



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.

Funded by





About QDN

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is a statewide network of, by and for people with disability dedicated to advancing the rights and inclusion of people with disability in Queensland. QDN works to amplify the voices of people with disability, advocating for policy reforms, systemic changes, and services and products that are co-designed by people with disability. Through its extensive network of members and partnerships with government agencies, and community organisations and industry groups, QDN plays a pivotal role in shaping disability policy and driving positive change at local, state, and national levels. With a focus on leadership, change and collaboration, QDN strives to create a more inclusive and supportive society where people with disability can be active participants in all aspects of life.

About QDN's Women's Network

The QDN Women's Network is an online community for Queensland women with disability to come together, share, discuss and contribute in a safe and inclusive space. This online community page is welcoming and inclusive of all women, non-binary and feminine identifying people with disability living in Queensland. The women's virtual group is a place where women can talk about issues that are important to them as well as share information and resources with each other. The group has been going since 2016.

QDN's work

QDN has a longstanding history of advocating for the rights and leadership of people with disability in Queensland. Previously QDN Women's Network has provided advice on a range of topics, including Domestic and Family Violence, women's health and employment.

Through research, talking to members, policy analysis, and grassroots advocacy efforts, QDN has shed light on the unique challenges faced by people with disability and has advocated for policy reforms and initiatives that promote accessibility, inclusion, and equal opportunities. QDN has actively engaged with government bodies, businesses, universities, and community organisations to foster collaboration and drive systemic change. Through its extensive network and collaborative partnerships, QDN has been instrumental in amplifying the voices of people with disability in Queensland in disability rights and leadership, including inclusion and accessible transportation, housing, health services, and information.

Through our various projects, initiatives, and partnerships, QDN works to address systemic barriers, promote social inclusion, and advance the rights of people with disability in all aspects of life. Whether through policy advocacy, community engagement, or capacity-building activities, QDN remains committed to creating a more inclusive and equitable society where all people can live with dignity, autonomy, and full participation.



Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the funding support from the Queensland Government, which has made these events possible. We acknowledge Karin Swift as the facilitator of the in person and online forum and also as the author of this report. We also acknowledge Karin's leadership and advocacy for women with disability over the past three decades. We would also like to acknowledge our project partners WWILD-SVP for their valuable collaboration and support in our efforts to advance the rights and inclusion of women with disability. We also extend our appreciation to our keynote speakers, whose expertise and insights enriched our discussions and inspired action towards positive change. Additionally, we would like to thank our panel speakers for their contributions and willingness to share their experiences and perspectives on improving employment outcomes for women with disability. Their participation has been instrumental in fostering meaningful dialogue and advancing our collective efforts towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all. We also extend our gratitude to all participants for their engagement, contributions, and commitment to advancing the rights and inclusion of women with disability in the workforce.

The Importance of Co-design

Co-design is a fundamental principle underlying the approach taken by QDN, both in this project and in all of our work. By embracing co-design, QDN ensures that the voices, experiences, and perspectives of women, girls, feminine-identifying, and non-binary people with disability are at the forefront of decision-making processes. Through collaborative engagement with stakeholders, including people with disability, government agencies, businesses, universities, and community organisations, QDN seeks to co-create solutions that address the complex challenges faced by women with disability.

Co-design enables the identification of nuanced barriers and the development of tailored strategies that resonate with the lived experiences of people with disability. By prioritising co-design principles, this project aimed to foster ownership, inclusivity, and accountability, ultimately driving meaningful and sustainable change towards a more inclusive and equitable society for all.



Introduction

Women with disability¹ in Queensland are an invaluable and vibrant part of our community, possessing an array of talents, skills, and perspectives that enrich our society and contribute to economic security. Despite facing systemic barriers and challenges, women with disability demonstrate resilience, determination, and ingenuity in pursuing their aspirations and making meaningful contributions to the workforce. Their diverse experiences, expertise, and innovative approaches bring unique insights and solutions to the table, driving creativity, productivity, and inclusivity in various industries and sectors. From entrepreneurship and leadership to advocacy and innovation, women with disability play a vital role in advancing economic growth, social progress, and diversity. Their talents and potential are boundless, and by harnessing their strengths and empowering their voices, we can unlock new opportunities, foster inclusive prosperity, and build a more equitable future for all in Queensland.

Women with disability face numerous barriers to economic participation, including employment, in Queensland. These barriers encompass discrimination, lack of accessibility, limited education and training opportunities, inadequate support services, negative societal attitudes, family and domestic violence, lack of affordable and accessible housing, over-representation in the child safety system and other social issues.

This position paper aims to delve into these multifaceted challenges comprehensively, advocating for the rights of women with disability and making recommendations for the Queensland government, businesses, universities, and the community sector to address them effectively. By fostering inclusive policies, promoting accessibility, investing in education and support services, combating discrimination and stigma, addressing systemic social issues, and providing incentives, we can create a more equitable and empowering environment for women with disability to thrive economically and socially.

¹ QDN uses a gender-affirming definition of women with disability that recognises and respects individuals' self-identified gender identities, ensuring inclusivity and equality for all women, including those who may be transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming.



Addressing the Legacy of Low Expectations

As highlighted by one of our panel members, QDN believes the legacy of low expectations has profoundly impacted the economic participation of women, girls, feminine-identifying, and non-binary people with disability in Queensland. Historically, societal attitudes and perceptions have often underestimated the capabilities and potential of people with disability, leading to limited opportunities, reduced access to education and employment, and perpetuating cycles of dependency and marginalisation.

This legacy of low expectations has created systemic barriers that hinder the economic empowerment and social inclusion of people with disability. QDN recognises the detrimental impact of these low expectations and strives to challenge and dismantle them through advocacy and leadership initiatives. QDN believes by fostering a culture of high expectations and equal opportunities, people with disability can break free from the constraints of low expectations and realise their full potential in all aspects of life.



About the forums

The forums hosted by QDN served as vital platforms for fostering dialogue, sharing experiences, and advocating for the rights and inclusion of women with disability. Through both online and in-person gatherings, these forums provide opportunities for women with disability to connect, collaborate, and amplify their voices on issues ranging from economic participation to social inclusion.

During Queensland Women's Week, QDN organised two significant events—an online forum and an in-person gathering at Parliament House—to facilitate discussions and address the unique challenges faced by women with disability. These forums brought together a diverse range of stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, advocates, and women with disability to exchange ideas, identify solutions, and drive positive change. By creating spaces for meaningful engagement and collaboration, QDN's forums played a crucial role in empowering women with disability and advocating for their economic security and overall well-being.





Who attended?

The forums hosted by QDN were attended by a diverse range of participants, including women with disability, policymakers, community leaders, advocates, and representatives from various organisations. Both the online forum and the in-person gathering at Parliament House attracted attendance of over 40 participants engaging in discussions and sharing their insights.



Why QDN hosted these forums

During Queensland Women's Week, QDN held two pivotal events aimed at fostering dialogue, collaboration, and women's leadership among women with disability. The first event, held online, served as a virtual forum where participants from across the state could convene to discuss the intersectional challenges they face in economic participation. Through interactive discussions and panel sessions, attendees not only shared their experiences and insights but also showcased their leadership by proposing innovative solutions and advocating for change.

The second event, held in person at Parliament House, provided a platform for women with disability to exhibit their leadership by engaging directly with policymakers, government officials, and community leaders. This face-to-face gathering facilitated meaningful exchanges, allowing participants to assert their expertise, influence decision-making, and drive policy reforms that prioritise the economic empowerment of women with disability. By focusing on women's leadership in these events, QDN highlighted the importance of amplifying the voices, expertise, and agency of women with disability in shaping a more inclusive and equitable society in Queensland.

The goal of the forums organised by QDN was to foster collaboration, awareness, and action towards improving economic security and social inclusion for women with disability in Queensland. These forums aimed to create a space where women with disability could share their experiences, voice their concerns, and contribute to discussions on key issues affecting their lives. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, advocates, and women with disability the forums sought to identify barriers, exchange ideas, and develop strategies for driving positive change. Ultimately, the goal was to empower women with disability to advocate for their rights, access equal opportunities, and participate fully in all aspects of society. Through meaningful engagement and collaboration, the forums aimed to advance the goal of creating a more inclusive and equitable Queensland for all.



Key points raised by speakers at the forum

During the forums hosted by QDN, various speakers addressed key topic areas relevant to improving economic security and social inclusion for women with disability. The speakers included academics, policymakers, disability advocates, experts in disability rights, and women with disability sharing their lived experiences. Topics covered during the forums encompassed:

- accessibility in employment and education,
- challenges faced by women with disability in the workforce,
- strategies for promoting inclusion and empowerment, and
- the importance of intersectionality in addressing the diverse needs of women with disability.

Additionally, speakers discussed policy recommendations, best practices, and initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality and disability rights. Their insights and contributions provided valuable perspectives and helped inform discussions on how to overcome barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable society for all women with disability.

Online Forum

The Master of Ceremonies (MC) for the online forum was Karin Swift, founding member of QDN, Group Convenor of QDN Women's Group, President of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA), Industry Fellow at Griffith University and independent policy consultant. Karin welcomed keynote speakers Dr Sharon Boyce and Professor Linda Agnew. Sharon is the QDN Chairperson, Sharon is the Chair of the Queensland Disability Advisory Council and a member of the Independent Advisory Council to the NDIA. She is also co-chair of the children and young peoples group for the agency. Professor Linda Agnew has built her career in the Higher Education sector where she strives for excellence to foster a learning and working culture that supports students and staff to reach their potential.

Sharon spoke about her various leadership roles and her experience of being an education academic and consultant, focused on raising disability awareness across Queensland from a social justice perspective and empowering women with disability and supporting them to live independent lives in the community. Linda spoke about her career as an academic and her determination to continue as a scientist despite being diagnosed with degenerative retinal dystrophy, causing blindness and being appointed as the only blind Dean. She also spoke about what universities can and were doing to pave the way for women with disability to undertake university studies and academic careers.

Karin then introduced the panel members for the session, Sarah Empy, consultant in the Arts, Claire Mitchel, first Board Member of Down Syndrome Australia with Down Syndrome and Leanne Watts, a rehabilitation specialist and allied health professional. Each of these women spoke about their experiences in their varied careers and how they all worked in non-traditional roles, given their disabilities. Each of these speakers shared their unique insights and perspectives which later informed group discussions and recommendations made by participants, discussed further in this paper.



Face-to-face forum

The face-to-face forum was held at Parliament House, Brisbane on International Women's Day, 8 March, 2024. Karin Swift shared the MC duties for this event with QDN CEO, Michelle Moss. Karin was also a keynote speaker at this session. Karin spoke about her extensive career in the disability, women's and human rights space, including some international representative work she had undertaken. She also spoke about the importance of flexible work options for women with disability and how the pandemic opened up opportunities for women with disability to work from home through online meeting technologies that weren't prevalent before. Karin then welcomed Professor Linda Agnew to redeliver her keynote presentation.

Karin then introduced the panel members for the session, Jane Britt, Senior Policy Officer for People With Disabilities Australia (PWDA), Stephanie Dower, a screen producer, writer, consultant and access coordinator, and Kristy Hall, a Peer Worker with WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention Association. Each woman spoke about how their career developed. Jane spoke about her years of policy, advocacy and leadership experience across the disability sector and the importance of women with disability rising above the legacy of low expectations in relation to employment. Stephanie spoke about breaking into a non-traditional field for people with disability of film and media and her passion for reframing how people with disability are portrayed in mainstream media. Kristy spoke about her passion for shedding light on the experiences of people with disabilities facing domestic and sexual violence. As a peer worker for WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention Association, Kristy spoke about her work of empowering those who have experienced domestic violence.

By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment, the speakers motivated participants to collaborate actively in group work, enabling them to brainstorm innovative solutions and propose practical recommendations. Their passion, expertise, and encouragement energised the group, resulting in productive and meaningful exchanges that ultimately contributed to the development of impactful recommendations for advancing the rights and inclusion of women with disabilities.



What we heard

At the forum:

QDN members have consistently shared their experiences and voiced their concerns regarding the myriad obstacles they face in accessing economic opportunities across four key areas:



1. Workplace environments:

Frustrations about encountering discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace, often leading to limited job prospects and lower wages. Additionally, many have highlighted the significant challenges posed by the lack of accessibility features in both public spaces and workplaces, hindering their ability to navigate and perform tasks effectively.



2. Training and education:

QDN members have spoken about the limited access to education and vocational training programs, which are vital for enhancing employability and career advancement.



3. Inclusive public infrastructure and technology:

The lack of adequate support services, such as transportation assistance and assistive technologies, has also been a recurring issue, further marginalising people with disability from fully participating in the workforce.



4. Family and domestic violence:

Moreover, our members have shared experiences of facing family and domestic violence, exacerbating their economic vulnerabilities and perpetuating cycles of financial dependence and isolation.

These firsthand accounts underscore the urgent need for concerted action to address these systemic barriers and ensure the economic empowerment of women with disability in Queensland.

Over the past 22 years:

Over the past twenty-two years, QDN members and Queenslanders with disability have provided feedback on what is key to improving employment outcomes and economic security for people with disability. QDN has emphasised the importance of implementing policies and initiatives that promote inclusive employment practices and remove systemic barriers for people with disability. QDN has advocated for the development of affirmative action measures, disability awareness training for employers, and financial incentives for businesses to hire and retain employees with disability.



Recommendations

The following recommendations build upon QDN's work in this area over the last two decades, as well as the feedback, ideas and actions identified by participants of QDN's two forums.





Recommendations for Government

It is imperative that policymakers and the three levels of Government prioritise the implementation of inclusive policies and initiatives aimed at removing systemic barriers and promoting the economic inclusion of women with disability. This includes enacting and enforcing anti-discrimination laws, strengthening accessibility regulations, and providing financial incentives for businesses to adopt inclusive recruitment practices. By prioritising these recommendations, the government can create a more inclusive and equitable environment where women with disability can thrive economically and contribute fully to.

Women with disability at our forums developed the following recommendations for government:

- 1. Promote inclusive policies:** Enact and enforce policies that promote inclusion and prohibit discrimination against women with disability in all spheres of life, including employment, education, housing, and support services.
- 2. Disability Service Plans:** Inclusion of key strategies in each government department Disability Service plan around women with disability
- 3. Across Government Departments:** Disability Employment Networks be established to include gender specific strategies – for example, promoting business champions who are women with disability.
- 4. Targets:** Governments setting specific targets and benchmarks for the employment of women with disability across government agencies to ensure measurable progress towards greater representation and inclusion.
- 5. Enhance accessibility:** Invest in improving accessibility in workplaces, public spaces, transportation systems, and housing infrastructure to ensure full participation and independence for women with disability.
- 6. Invest in education and training:** Increase funding for inclusive education programs and vocational training opportunities tailored to the needs of women with disability, fostering skill development and enhancing employability.
- 7. Invest in specific programs for women with disability as small business owners:** Including peer lead and co-designed training and accelerator programs to build skills and knowledge as small business owners, including mentorship programs
- 8. Inclusion of women with disability on Boards, executive positions, committees and recruitment panels across workplaces:** To improve representation and inclusive and informed decision-making
- 9. Include women with disability in Brisbane 2032 Games legacy initiatives:** Fund capacity building initiatives and pilot programs across key sectors in relation to the 2032 Games.
- 10. Expand support services:** Invest in the expansion of support services, including accessible transportation, personal care support, mental health services, and assistive technologies, to address the diverse needs of women with disability.

- 11. Address discrimination and stigma:** Launch public awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes, combat discrimination, and promote positive attitudes towards women with disability, fostering a culture of inclusivity and acceptance.
- 12. Address Family and Domestic Violence:** Implement comprehensive strategies to address family and domestic violence, including accessible services, access to safe housing, legal assistance, trauma-informed support services, and prevention programs tailored to the needs of women with disability.
- 13. Improve access to affordable and accessible housing:** Develop and implement policies to increase the availability of affordable and accessible housing options for women with disability, ensuring their right to independent living and community inclusion.
- 14. Support involvement in child safety system:** Provide tailored support services and advocacy assistance to women with disability involved in the child safety system, ensuring their rights are upheld, and their needs are met effectively.
- 15. Promote advocacy and leadership:** Foster partnerships with disability advocacy organisations and community groups to amplify the voices of women with disability, promoting self-advocacy, empowerment, and systemic change.
- 16. Ensure equitable work conditions:** Enforce workplace regulations and standards to ensure equitable work conditions, fair wages, reasonable accommodations, and opportunities for career advancement for women with disability.
- 17. Policy change:** Implementing policies that provide incentives, such as tax credits or subsidies, to encourage individuals with disabilities to enter and remain in the workforce.
- 18. Disability inclusive procurement:** All levels of government implement disability procurement policies to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in government contracting processes.





Recommendations for Universities

Accessibility and inclusion in higher education settings to ensure equal opportunities for women with disability is a key priority. Through initiatives such as the University Accord, universities need to invest in the development and expansion of inclusive education programs, providing necessary accommodations and support services to meet the diverse needs of students with disability. Further, universities need to establish internship and mentorship programs specifically tailored to women with disability, facilitating hands-on experience and professional development opportunities. By fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, universities can empower women with disability to pursue higher education, acquire valuable skills, and achieve their academic and career aspirations.

Women with disability at the QDN forums identified the following recommendations for universities:

- 1. Research Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between universities and disability advocacy organisations to conduct research on the economic participation of women with disability and develop innovative solutions to address their needs.
- 2. Inclusive Education Programs:** Develop and expand inclusive education programs within universities to ensure equal access to higher education for women with disability, promoting their academic and professional advancement including implementing accessible learning materials, providing assistive technologies, and offering disability support services such as counselling and academic assistance.
- 3. Internship and Mentorship Programs:** Establish internship and mentorship programs for women with disability in collaboration with universities, providing hands-on experience and guidance for career development.
- 4. Disability inclusive procurement:** Universities implement disability procurement policies to promote the inclusion of people with disability in university contracting processes.



Recommendations for Advocacy Organisations

Advocacy organisations can play a role in advocating for change in policy, legislation and practices in the workplace and learning institutions that deliver improved outcomes for women with disability and more inclusive and equitable employment opportunities for women with disability, ultimately empowering them to achieve economic independence and fulfill their potential in the workforce.

Women with disability who attended QDN forums identified the following recommendations for advocacy organisations:

- 1. Policy Development:** Engage with government agencies to co-design, develop and implement policies that promote the economic inclusion of women with disability, addressing systemic barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for employment and advancement.
- 2. Funding Allocation:** Advocate for increased funding allocation for education and training programs, and accessibility initiatives to better meet the needs of women with disability.
- 3. Legislative Reform:** Advocate for legislative reforms to strengthen anti-discrimination laws, enhance accessibility standards, and protect the rights of women with disability in the workforce and beyond.
- 4. Disability inclusive procurement:** Advocacy organisations advocate that all employers have disability inclusive procurement policies to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in all contracting processes, including their own.



Recommendations for Business

It is essential for businesses to adopt inclusive practices that promote the economic participation of women with disability. This includes implementing disability-inclusive hiring practices, providing reasonable adjustments and fostering inclusive work environments. Businesses can benefit from diversity by tapping into the unique perspectives, talents, and skills that women with disability bring to the workforce. Further, investing in accessibility improvements in the workplace, such as physical modifications and assistive technologies, can enhance productivity and create a more welcoming environment for employees with disability. By prioritising diversity and inclusion, businesses can not only meet their legal obligations but also gain a competitive edge, improve employee morale, and contribute to a more equitable society.

Fostering partnerships between the Queensland government and businesses is vital for promoting the economic participation of women with disability. Collaborative initiatives can include incentive programs for businesses that prioritise hiring women with disability, providing subsidies for workplace adjustments and offering training programs on disability inclusion for employees. Additionally, businesses can play a crucial role in creating accessible products, services, and environments, ensuring that women with disability can fully participate in economic activities as consumers and employees. By working together, government and businesses can leverage their resources and expertise to create a more inclusive and equitable business environment that benefits everyone.

Women with disability who came to our forum developed the following recommendations for businesses:

- 1. Disability-Inclusive Recruitment Practices:** Encourage businesses to adopt disability-inclusive recruitment practices through awareness campaigns, incentives, training, learning and development and partnerships with government and disability advocacy organisations.
- 2. Accessibility Audits:** Provide businesses with resources and support to conduct accessibility audits of their facilities and services, identifying barriers and implementing necessary improvements to accommodate employees with disability.
- 3. Reasonable workplace Adjustments:** Advocate for workplace adjustments, such as flexible work arrangements, assistive technologies, and disability awareness training for employees, to support the inclusion and retention of women with disability.
- 4. Disability inclusive procurement:** Businesses, particularly big businesses, implement disability inclusive procurement policies to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in business contracting processes.
- 5. Mentorship programs for small business owners:** Governments developing mentorship programs for women with disability who are small business owners to assist them to become entrepreneurs.
- 6. Promoting inclusive employment practices:** Businesses promoting the employment of women with challenges and other inclusionary practices being champions for other businesses to follow.



Recommendations for the Community Sector

It is imperative to foster collaboration and partnership among community organisations to support the economic participation of women with disability. Community organisations can play a pivotal role in providing tailored support services, advocacy assistance, and leadership programs that address the unique needs and challenges faced by women with disability. By working together, community organisations can collaborate, share best practices, and amplify the voices of women with disability in advocacy and policy development. Further, community-led initiatives, such as peer support groups, mentorship programs, and skill-building workshops, can provide valuable opportunities for networking, learning, and professional development. By harnessing the collective strength and expertise of women with disability and the community sector, we can create a more supportive and inclusive environment where women with disability can thrive economically and achieve their full potential.

Women with disability who attended our forum developed the following recommendations for the community sector:

- 1. Capacity Building:** Build the capacity of community organisations to provide tailored support services, advocacy assistance, and leadership programs for women with disability, addressing their unique needs and promoting social inclusion.
- 2. Collaborative Partnerships:** Develop collaborative partnerships between disability organisations, community groups, and service providers to coordinate efforts, share resources, and amplify the voices of women with disability in advocacy and policy development.
- 3. Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the rights and needs of women with disability, challenging stereotypes, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive society.
- 4. Disability inclusive procurement:** The community sector implement disability procurement policies to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in contracting processes.



Recommendations for policies to provide incentives to work

It is crucial to implement policies and programs that provide financial stability and support for women with disability transitioning into employment. One effective strategy is to introduce gradual phasing out of Centrelink benefits as people secure employment, ensuring a smooth transition and mitigating financial insecurity. Additionally, income exemptions can be provided for people with disability participating in employment or education programs, allowing them to retain essential benefits while pursuing economic opportunities. Furthermore, offering a comprehensive support services package, including access to health services, transportation assistance, and childcare subsidies, can help offset the financial implications of losing Centrelink benefits and facilitate successful integration into the workforce. By implementing these incentives, women with disability can be encouraged and supported to pursue employment opportunities while ensuring their financial stability and well-being.

Women with disability who attended our forums identified the following strategies to ensure women with disability were able to pursue work opportunities while still have the safety net of income support and related subsidies and services:

- 1. Gradual Phasing Out:** Introduce gradual phasing out of Centrelink benefits as people transition into employment, ensuring a smooth transition and mitigating financial insecurity.
- 2. Income Exemptions:** Provide income exemptions for people with disability participating in employment or education programs, allowing them to retain essential benefits while pursuing economic opportunities.
- 3. Support Services Package:** Offer a comprehensive support services package, including access to healthcare, transportation assistance, and childcare subsidies, to offset the financial burden of losing Centrelink benefits.



Further Background - what we know from research and practice



Barriers to economic participation for women with disability

Women with disability in Queensland encounter a multitude of barriers that impede their economic participation and hinder their access to employment opportunities. These barriers are deeply entrenched within societal structures and systems, presenting significant challenges that intersect with various factors such as discrimination, accessibility limitations, inadequate education and training, lack of support services, negative attitudes, sex and gender discrimination and the pervasive impact of family and domestic violence. Understanding and addressing these barriers comprehensively is essential to creating a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals, regardless of disability, have equal opportunities to thrive economically and contribute to their communities.

Women with disability at our forums identified the following barriers. These barriers are supported by the literature:

- 1. Discrimination and Stereotyping:** Women with disability often face discrimination and stereotyping in employment, resulting in limited job opportunities and lower wages compared to their non-disabled counterparts².

² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*.

2. **Lack of Accessibility:** Many workplaces lack adequate accessibility features, such as ramps, elevators, quiet spaces and accessible bathrooms, making it challenging for women with disability to navigate and perform their jobs effectively³.
3. **Limited Education and Training Opportunities:** Access to education and vocational training programs is crucial for securing meaningful employment. However, women with disability often encounter barriers in accessing these opportunities, hampering their employability⁴.
4. **Inadequate Support Services:** The availability of support services, including transportation assistance and assistive technologies, is essential for enabling women with disability to fully participate in the workforce. Yet, many face obstacles in accessing these services⁵.
5. **Negative Attitudes and Misconceptions:** Negative societal attitudes and misconceptions about disability contribute to the stigmatisation of women with disability in the workplace, leading to discrimination and exclusionary practices.⁶
6. **Impact of Family and Domestic Violence:** Family and domestic violence exacerbate the challenges faced by women with disability. Financial dependence, employment barriers, mental health issues, and limited access to support services further compound their vulnerability⁷.
7. **Lack of Affordable and Accessible Housing:** The shortage of affordable and accessible housing options poses a significant obstacle for women with disability, affecting their independence, safety, and ability to participate in employment and community life⁸.
8. **Involvement in Child Safety System:** Women with disability are disproportionately represented in the child safety system, facing challenges in navigating complex systems and accessing appropriate support services. Involvement in the child safety system can exacerbate their economic vulnerabilities⁹.
9. **Advocacy and Leadership:** Empowering women with disability through advocacy and self-advocacy is crucial in addressing systemic barriers and promoting their economic participation. Providing platforms for advocacy and amplifying their voices can drive meaningful change¹⁰.
10. **Equitable Work Conditions:** Ensuring equitable work conditions, including fair wages, reasonable adjustments, and opportunities for career advancement, is essential for promoting the economic empowerment of women with disability¹¹.

3 Australian Government Department of Health. (2024). Disability Awareness and Education Initiative.

4 Australian Human Rights Commission. (2022). Disability Discrimination.

5 Australian Network on Disability. (2023). Employer Toolkit: Building Disability Confidence.

6 Department of Social Services. (2020). Disability and Carers Program.

7 Disability Services Queensland. (2024). Support Services for People with Disability.

8 National Disability Strategy. (2022). Improving the Economic Participation of People with Disability.

9 Queensland Government. (2021). Accessibility Regulation

10 UNESCO. (2021). Guidelines for Inclusive Education: Ensuring Access to Education for All.

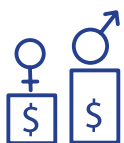
11 World Health Organisation. (2024). Disability and Health.



The importance of gender diversity inclusion

The economic participation of women, girls, feminine-identifying, and non-binary people with disability in Queensland is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. By addressing systemic barriers, promoting accessibility, investing in education and support services, addressing discrimination and stigma, and fostering partnerships across sectors, we can create a more enabling environment where individuals of all gender identities can thrive economically and contribute fully to society.

It is imperative for government, businesses, universities, and the community sector to work collaboratively and prioritise the needs and rights of women, girls, feminine-identifying, and non-binary people with disability. Through concerted efforts and collective action that recognise the intersectionality of gender and disability, we can build a society that values diversity, respects the rights of all individuals, and ensures equal opportunities for economic security. We want to strive towards a future where every person, regardless of gender identity or disability, can achieve their dreams and aspirations.



The Gender Pay Gap

The Gender Pay Gap statistics released by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in February 2024¹² shed light on the ongoing disparities in earnings between men and women in Australia. The report revealed that women continue to face significant challenges in achieving pay parity, with the national gender pay gap standing at 13.4% on average¹³. Importantly, the report also highlighted the compounded effects of discrimination and systemic barriers on women with disability, who experience even greater economic disparities. Women with disability often encounter additional hurdles in accessing employment opportunities, obtaining fair wages, and advancing in their careers. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions that prioritise the rights and needs of women with disability, alongside broader efforts to promote pay equity and combat workplace discrimination. By implementing policies and initiatives recommended by the WGEA and other relevant organisations, Australia can take meaningful steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable workforce for all.

¹² Workplace Gender Equality Agency. (2024). *Gender Pay Gap Report*.

¹³ Ibid.



Opportunities for future change and policy levers

Disability Royal Commission Recommendations

The recently released Disability Royal Commission (DRC) Final Report provides comprehensive insights and recommendations¹⁴ aimed at addressing systemic issues and improving outcomes for people with disability across various domains.

The recommendations put forth by the DRC regarding education and employment serve as powerful leverage for driving systemic change and promoting greater inclusion of people with disabilities in these spheres. By highlighting key areas for improvement, such as access to quality education, vocational training, and employment opportunities, the DRC recommendations provide a roadmap for policymakers, employers, and educational institutions to follow. These recommendations underscore the importance of addressing barriers to education and employment faced by people with disabilities, including discrimination, lack of accessibility, and inadequate support services. By implementing the DRC recommendations, stakeholders can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable systems that enable people with disabilities to fully participate in education and employment, leading to improved outcomes and greater social inclusion for all.

¹⁴ For more information, see: [chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/Final%20Report%20-%20Volume%207%2C%20Inclusive%20education%2C%20employment%20and%20housing%20-%20Summary%20and%20recommendations.pdf](https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/Final%20Report%20-%20Volume%207%2C%20Inclusive%20education%2C%20employment%20and%20housing%20-%20Summary%20and%20recommendations.pdf)

The recommendations issued by the DRC concerning employment aim to address longstanding barriers and promote greater inclusion of people with disability in the workforce. These recommendations emphasise the need for comprehensive reforms to employment practices, policies, and support systems to create more equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Key areas highlighted in the recommendations include the implementation of inclusive hiring practices, the provision of reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and the promotion of disability awareness and training for employers. Additionally, the DRC calls for measures to address systemic discrimination and promote the economic participation of people with disabilities, including targeted support services, vocational training programs, and initiatives to improve workplace accessibility. By implementing these recommendations, policymakers, employers, and stakeholders can work towards creating a more inclusive and supportive employment environment that enables people with disabilities to fully participate and thrive in the workforce.

The DRC recommendations on higher education and employment provide valuable leverage for enhancing the economic participation of women with disability. By addressing systemic barriers and promoting inclusive practices within higher education institutions, such as providing accessible learning environments and support services, these recommendations can help improve educational outcomes for women with disability and enhance their employability. Additionally, recommendations aimed at promoting inclusive hiring practices, reasonable accommodations, and supportive workplace policies can facilitate greater access to employment opportunities and career advancement for women with disabilities. By leveraging these recommendations, policymakers, employers, and educators can work collaboratively to create more inclusive pathways to economic participation for women with disabilities, ultimately fostering greater financial independence, empowerment, and social inclusion.

Developing an inclusive employment legacy from the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games

Developing an inclusive employment legacy from the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games presents a unique opportunity to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workforce. By prioritising inclusive recruitment practices, accessibility, and accommodations throughout the planning and execution of the Games, stakeholders can set a precedent for fostering an inclusive employment environment beyond the event. This includes ensuring equal opportunities for people with disability to participate in various roles, from event management to hospitality and transportation services. Moreover, partnerships with local businesses, community organisations, and person lead disability organisations and advocacy groups can facilitate the recruitment and training of individuals with disability, creating sustainable employment opportunities and leaving a lasting impact on the region's workforce. By leveraging the momentum of the Games, policymakers, employers, and stakeholders can collaborate to build a legacy of inclusive employment that promotes social inclusion, economic participation, and equal opportunities for all.

To do this effectively it is essential to prioritise the following recommendations:

- Stakeholders should implement inclusive recruitment across all sectors involved in organising and hosting the Games, ensuring equal opportunities for individuals with diverse backgrounds and abilities. This includes providing accessibility training for staff, creating accessible job ads and offering accommodations throughout the recruitment process.
- Investing in training and development programs tailored to the needs of people with disability so they can enhance their skills and employability, both during and after the Games.
- Fostering partnerships with disability advocacy organisations and local businesses can facilitate the recruitment and retention of individuals with disabilities, creating a more diverse and inclusive workforce.
- By prioritising these recommendations, the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games can leave a lasting legacy of inclusive employment, promoting social inclusion, economic participation, and equal opportunities for all members of the community.

Incorporating a gender lens is crucial to ensure that the unique experiences and needs of women with disability are adequately addressed. As stated earlier, women often face intersecting forms of discrimination and barriers to employment, and failing to consider these factors can perpetuate inequalities in the workforce. By adopting a gender-sensitive approach, stakeholders can better understand and respond to the specific challenges faced by women, including issues related to childcare responsibilities, access to training and education, and workplace discrimination. Moreover, a gender lens allows for the identification of opportunities to promote gender equity and empowerment within the workforce, such as targeted mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and policies that address the gender pay gap.

The NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2024-2028

Since our forums QDN acknowledges the NDIS has released the Participant Employment Strategy 2024-2028¹⁵. The Strategy aims to:

- help participants to think about work and get a job
- help local area coordinators and planning staff better support participants with employment goals
- make it easier for participants to use their NDIS plan so they can get a job and be supported at work
- work with providers to improve the way they deliver supports and share information with participants about how well different providers are performing
- ensure the NDIS works with other Government services that offer employment support to participants
- help employers to identify the talent pool of NDIS participants and connect with NDIS job seekers.

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

QDN supports people with disability being able to use funded NDIS supports to reach their employment goals and have more of a say in how these supports are provided. Incorporating a gender lens into this strategy is crucial to ensure that the unique needs and experiences of women with disability are appropriately addressed. A gender-sensitive approach acknowledges the intersecting factors of gender and disability, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities faced by women in the workforce. By considering gender-specific challenges, such as carer responsibilities, access to accessible health and workplace discrimination, the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy can develop tailored initiatives and support mechanisms to empower women with disabilities to access and maintain meaningful employment. Prioritising gender sensitivity ensures that the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy is responsive to the diverse needs of all participants, contributing to greater social inclusion and economic empowerment for women with disability.

Opportunities for women with disability through the University Accord

The University Accord incorporates specific provisions tailored to address the unique challenges faced by women with disability in higher education, aligning with principles of inclusivity and equity.¹⁶ Firstly, it emphasises the necessity of providing accessible facilities and resources, such as ramps, elevators, and assistive technologies, to ensure equitable access for women with disability on campus¹⁷. Additionally, the Accord underscores the importance of offering reasonable adjustments, including flexible timetables and alternative formats for course materials, to meet the diverse needs of women with disability and facilitate their academic success¹⁸. Furthermore, it advocates for gender-sensitive policies and practices within universities, such as addressing gender-based violence and harassment and promoting equitable access to leadership and mentoring opportunities.¹⁹ By incorporating these specific provisions, the University Accord aims to create an inclusive and empowering environment for women with disability in higher education, enabling them to realise their full potential academically and professionally.

Incorporating a gender lens into the University Accord is essential to ensure that the accord adequately addresses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women with disability in higher education. A gender-sensitive approach recognises the intersecting factors of gender and disability, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to access, retention, and success experienced by women in academic settings. By considering gender-specific issues, such as differential treatment, stereotyping and lack of representation in leadership positions, the University Accord can develop targeted initiatives and policies to promote gender equity and inclusivity within universities.

16 Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). Disability Rights. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights>

17 Australian Disability Discrimination Act. (1992). Disability Discrimination Act. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013C00085>

18 World Health Organisation. (2013). Violence Against Women. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-women>

19 Ibid.

Possibilities of women with disability becoming sole traders

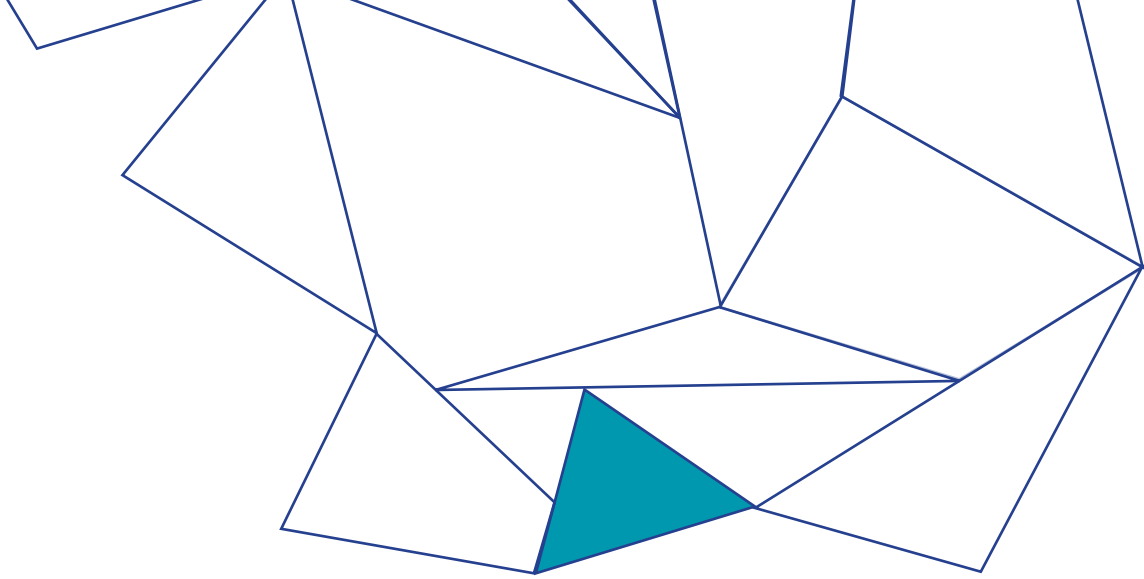
Many women with disability in Queensland are exploring entrepreneurship and becoming sole traders as a pathway to economic independence and flexibility. By venturing into entrepreneurship, these women can create their own opportunities, tailor their work environments to accommodate their needs, and pursue ventures that align with their passions and skills.

Becoming a sole trader allows women with disability to exercise autonomy and control over their work lives, offering a sense of empowerment and self-determination. QDN members have highlighted how this has opened up the world of work to them, particularly after the pandemic. However, while entrepreneurship presents exciting possibilities, it also comes with unique challenges, including accessing support to start a business, navigating the rules of having an Australian Business Number (ABN) and managing the demands of running a business.

QDN recognises the potential of entrepreneurship as a means of economic empowerment for women with disability and advocates for policies and support programs that facilitate their success as sole traders. Through tailored resources, mentorship opportunities, and networking initiatives, women with disability have the opportunity to thrive as entrepreneurs and contribute to Queensland's vibrant business landscape.

Working from home

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the landscape of work, offering new possibilities for women with disability, particularly in the realm of working from home. With the widespread adoption of video conferencing and flexible work arrangements, many women with disability have found increased opportunities to participate in the workforce from the comfort of their homes. Working from home can provide greater flexibility and autonomy, allowing women with disability to better manage their health and accessibility needs while fulfilling their professional responsibilities. Additionally, working remotely eliminates many of the physical barriers present in traditional office settings, offering a more inclusive environment for people with mobility impairments or other disabilities. However, it's essential to recognise that remote work also comes with its own set of challenges, including digital accessibility issues, social isolation, and potential disparities in access to resources and support. Nevertheless, the shift towards working from home options presents a promising avenue for enhancing employment opportunities and promoting greater inclusion for women with disability in the workforce.



Conclusion

The economic participation of women with disability in Queensland is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. By addressing systemic barriers, promoting accessibility, investing in education and support services, addressing discrimination and stigma, and fostering partnerships across sectors, we can create a more enabling environment where women with disability can thrive economically and contribute fully to society.

It is imperative for government, businesses, universities, and the community sector to work collaboratively and prioritise the needs and rights of women with disability. Through concerted efforts and collective action, we can build a society that values diversity, respects the rights of all individuals, and ensures equal opportunities for economic participation.

Addressing the multifaceted barriers to economic participation faced by women with disability in Queensland requires a collaborative and multi-stakeholder approach. By adopting inclusive policies, promoting accessibility, investing in education and support services, combating discrimination and stigma, addressing systemic social issues, providing incentives, and fostering partnerships between universities, government, businesses, and the community sector, we can create a more inclusive, equitable, and empowering environment where all individuals, regardless of disability, can thrive economically and socially.

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