

Food service employers can benefit from an untapped talent pool

Australian businesses in food service, retail and accommodation industries can benefit by reaching into an untapped pool of talent and considering people with disability during the hiring process.

New research released by the Australian Government titled [Building Employer Demand Research Report](#) shows that the majority (79 per cent) of Australian employers across these industries are open to hiring people with disability. While these numbers are encouraging, there is room for improvement as only 58 per cent are currently employing someone with disability.

Assistant Minister for Social Services, Housing and Disability Services Sarah Henderson said most employers recognised the value that people with disability bring to the workforce, however many were unsure about what was involved in the disability employment process at a practical level.

“77 per cent of businesses in food service, retail and accommodation industries believe it is important for their workplace to reflect the diversity in the community by including people with disability,” Ms Henderson said.

“When considering the things that mattered to them, 65 per cent said equal work opportunities for people with disabilities was an issue that was personally important to them.

“But the research tells us these businesses want more help to transition from ‘willing’ to ‘hiring.’”

Just 42 per cent of employers in food service, retail and accommodation industries thought their business was equipped to employ someone with a disability, and 42 per cent saw employing a person with disability as ‘a step into the unknown.’

Ms Henderson said a range of supports are available to open employers via [the JobAccess website](#) to support them through the process.

“Through JobAccess, employers can access practical advice and resources on all aspects of disability employment – from recruitment assistance, staff training and financial support, to workplace modifications, and tips for creating flexible work environments,” Ms Henderson said.

“Leading disability employers are already utilising these services and reaping the benefits, but we’re urging more employers to get on board.”

Compass Group Australia, which provides food service and support services to business and industry nationwide, is one organisation echoing that sentiment, joining the Australian Government’s *Employ their Ability* campaign.

Kathy Scott, Communications Manager at Compass Group Australia, said considering a person with a disability often leads them to the best person for the job.

“As an organisation with more than 10,000 employees, we obviously have a lot of employees who are living with disability, but recently, we’ve been working more closely with Disability Employment Services agencies through JobAccess to actively seek out people with disabilities,” Ms Scott said.

She said utilising JobAccess for recruitment has been good for business.

“We’ve found Disability Employment Services has really been keen to understand our organisation and partner with us to provide us with candidates that are suitable for the roles that we offer,” Ms Scott said.

“In the past year, we’ve employed 77 people that identify as having disability, and over that time we’ve had a 94 per cent retention rate, which is a real sign of the success.”

She said building a workforce that genuinely reflects and represents their customers and communities had multiple benefits.

“Everyone is individual and unique and they bring their own capabilities and skills to the role.

“And it’s not just the individual that benefits from disability employment, often it’s the whole family,” Ms Scott said.

For resources and assistance to hire people with disability go to www.JobAccess.gov.au.

Other key research findings:

- Across Australian employers in all industries, large (90%) and medium employers (83%) were more open to employing people with disability compared to small (77%) and micro businesses (76%).
- Among this cohort, there was widespread agreement that employees with disability have a good attitude to work (76% of ‘open’ medium businesses, 69% of ‘open’ large businesses) and are loyal to the business (69% of ‘open’ medium employers, 63% of ‘open’ large employers).
- Research identified professional and financial services; retail, accommodation and food services; and social, health care and education services as the major industry groups most supportive and open to hiring people with disability.
- Across all businesses, HR personnel were most open to hiring people with disability (93%) followed by admin staff (83%), middle managers (79%), people in leadership roles (76%) and business owners (73%).

