

MEDIA RELEASE

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Opportunity, imagination, innovation key to jobs for people with disability

Everybody who wants to work should be given that opportunity, with imagination and innovation the key to creating more jobs for people with disability or mental illness say Queensland's Mental Health Commission and Anti-Discrimination Commission.

The Commissions today provided a seven point plan to improve employment prospects in a joint submission to the National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability to mark International Day of People with a Disability.

Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Kevin Cocks and Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Lesley van Schoubroeck said there was a good legal framework in place for addressing discrimination in the workforce.

"However, bold reforms are needed to get people with disability or mental illness into fulfilling and rewarding work," the Commissioners said.

"We believe the current Disability Employment Services arrangements need overhauling to be based on strong relationships and bespoke responses for individuals with more sustainable employment outcomes."

Mr Cocks said better strategies were needed to encourage employers to take on workers with a disability.

"It takes a little innovation on behalf of employers to break jobs down into core elements and rebuild them with different blends of tasks to match the skills and play to the strengths of people living with disability or mental illness.

"Social procurement is a powerful model that offers exciting prospects for better employment outcomes that can benefit governments, businesses and people with disabilities," he said.

Dr van Schoubroeck said as well as supporting employers to be more inclusive, the broader community needed to support and understand that everyone adds value to the workplace.

"Community assumptions, stigma and stereotypes permeate the workplace and too often people see the disability instead of the person.

"All of us rely on reasonable adjustments and systems to support us to be productive at work, whether it's parental leave, or rehabilitation or flexibility around work hours," Dr van Schoubroeck said.

"Employers need to be equipped with the knowledge and resources to give them confidence to employ people with disabilities in meaningful roles and tap into the unique strengths, talent, intelligence, creativity, sensitivity and leadership skills they offer."

Mr Cocks said such an approach can enhance employers' triple bottom line, with research indicating an average return on investment of \$2.30 for every \$1.00 spent on positive workplace culture.

"The only barrier to employing people with disability or mental illness should be lack of imagination," he said.

The submission's seven point plan to improve employment prospects for people with disabilities includes:

1. Create inclusive workplaces
2. Tackle stigma
3. Improve employment programs
4. Construct new types of jobs
5. Create a 'pull effect'
6. Increase numbers of opportunities in the public service
7. Improve participation in education and training.

ENDS