

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## ‘Time for a seismic shift’: The big disability jobs push



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Major firms including Westpac and Allianz have urged employers facing staff shortages to recruit applicants with a disability, backing in a push by the Albanese government on lifting barriers to meaningful work.

Ahead of September’s jobs and skills summit, [Social Services Minister Amanda Rishworth](#) has been charged with driving cultural change among corporate bosses and peak industry groups, [as 480,000 positions sit vacant nationally](#).

Treasurer Jim Chalmers this week announced expanding employment opportunities would be a focus of the jobs summit.

New research by disability employment organisation Jigsaw shows half of Australian managers and HR executives said they had never hired or worked with a person with disability, despite 2.1 million Australians with disability being of working age. Just 47.8 per cent of the cohort are employed.

Nearly 80 per cent of Australian businesses told researchers that job-ready applicants with disability could help address labour shortages worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barriers existed for 65 per cent of employers, who said they were unsure how or where to access potential workers with a disability.

Jigsaw found 91 per cent of businesses that have hired a person with disability using the federal government’s Disability Employment Services (DES) system faced challenges in hiring and retaining candidates.

“In a workforce as tight as we’re currently facing, it’s time for a seismic shift in how employers engage with the disability workforce, and how governments support them to do so,” chief executive Paul Brown said.



Majella Knobel, director of access and inclusion at Westpac *Emma Foster*

## Shortage a catalyst

“Surely there has never been a better catalyst than the current labour shortage for governments and businesses to move from intent to action, and improve how they support workers with disability.”

Westpac’s access and inclusion director, Majella Knobel, said the bank had worked to create a positive culture and environment for all employees, including providing workplace adjustments.

“We believe that by improving accessibility, whether that be in systems or apps, services or products, places or communication, it ultimately benefits everyone,” she said.

“This is a view gathering pace in many organisations globally, leading to accessibility being placed – as it should be – at the heart of all decisions and processes.”

The bank works with Jigsaw to source [contract employment opportunities](#) and provides funding through social enterprise grants.

Australian Unity health insurance chief executive Rebecca Windsor encouraged the employment of people with a disability and the creation of teams that reflected the community.

“Having a job is hugely important to our wellbeing and that is no different for someone with a disability. The impact goes beyond the individual. Inclusive employment brings positive benefits to families, community and employers,” she said.

Allianz Senior human resources partner Glenn Slater urged employers to commit to diversity and inclusion policies at all levels.

“Most businesses have really great intentions. The challenge comes in knowing what they can practically do and how to actually help,” he said.

“If Australian businesses are given the direction, the resources and the skills to be able to make a difference, most will jump at the opportunity. And with organisations like Jigsaw, they can.”

Ms Rishworth told last week’s National Youth Disability Summit that access to [employment for younger workers and Australians with a disability was one of her major priorities in government](#).

Dr Chalmers and Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on Tuesday signalled the Liberal opposition could be invited to the summit at Parliament House, as work to finalise the list of 100 participants begins.