Unlocking potential:

what the research tells us
about the current enablers of
employment for disabled people

Executive Summary

What is the purpose of the literature review?

This review is part of the Disabled People, Tāngata Whaikaha Māori[1] and Tagata Sa'ilimalo[2] Research Project being undertaken by Hanga-Aro-Rau (HAR) and Waihanga Ara Rau (WAR) Workforce Development Councils (WDCs). This Research Project will provide a foundation of evidence for the development of Disability Action Plans for HAR and WAR, with the overall twin objectives of improving accessibility across our respective industries;[3] and enabling disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo to have fulfilling work and be valued for it.

Who is the literature review for and what topics does it focus on?

As a resource for multiple audiences, including those new to the disability kaupapa, the review can be read in its entirety or by individual section. These include:

- Definitions of essential terms and concepts
- An overview of the roles of key national agencies with responsibility for disabled people's employment, and the legislation, strategies, plans and agreements that their work is based on
- Insight into the status and wellbeing of disabled communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a particular focus on tāngata whaikaha Māori, tagata sa'ilimalo and women
- An examination of relevant national and international literature on the barriers to and enablers of employment for disabled people in workplaces in general, and where available in HAR and WAR industries specifically.

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[1] This is a Te Reo Māori term for Māori people with disabilities. First used by Maaka Tibble, a Ngāti Porou kaumatua, Whaikaha means people who are determined to do well (Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, n.d.a).

[2] This is a Samoan term for Pacific people with disabilities. Developed by the Tōfā Mamao Collective, it comes from the Samoan 'tagata' (person or people) and 'sa'ilimalo' (pursuit of success) (Tōfā Mamao, 2023; 2024).

[3] Manufacturing, Engineering, Logistics (HAR), Construction and Infrastructure (WAR).

How is disability defined and understood in the literature review?

People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that become disabling via the social, civic, political, and economic circumstances in which disabled people live. While acknowledging the contributions to contemporary understandings of disability made by *the social model of disability*, the *disability rights model* that grew out of it, and the *social relational model* with its recognition of embodied restrictions, it is important to note that none of these models account for Indigenous worldviews, which are holistic and based on collective responsibilities and obligations to others. This absence matters here in the settler colonial state of Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly given the ongoing and significant inequities experienced by tāngata whaikaha Māori.

How do we talk about disability in the literature review?

Identity-first language, such as 'disabled people' or 'disabled workers', is preferred by many disability organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand and is used here too. Disabled people also belong to a range of different groups: they are Māori, Pacific and/or Pākehā, or from one of Aotearoa New Zealand's many other ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups; they are part of LGBTQIA+ communities; they are migrants, at-risk youth and older people. Tāngata whaikaha Māori (Māori people with disabilities) and tagata sa'ilimalo (Pacific peoples with disabilities) are identities that express notions of determination to do well, and the pursuit of success. We use these terms throughout the review. Note too that references to 'disabled people' include tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo where the latter are not referenced specifically.

What are the main agencies in Aotearoa New Zealand and what are their roles?

Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People works in partnership with disability communities, Māori and government agencies in the service of disabled people and whānau. The Ministry also leads the response to the recommendations made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) at their regular reviews, and supports other government agencies to respond more effectively to the needs of disabled people in areas like employment, education, health and wellbeing. Ministries, Departments and Crown Entities with a key role in supporting disabled people in employment include Statistics New Zealand (data), the Ministry of Social Development (programmes, services, networks and resources), the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA; management and regulation of the education system), Employment New Zealand (resources) and Work and Income (advice and support). Other organisations that provide services, advice and support to employers and/or disabled people include the New Zealand Disability Employers Network, Disability Information New Zealand, Workbridge, Deaf Aotearoa, Workwise, Catapult, Comcare, AutismNZ, Be Lab and the Disabled Person's Assembly New Zealand.

What key pieces of legislation, strategies, plans and agreements support the work of agencies in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Disability rights in Aotearoa New Zealand are addressed through human rights legislation, specifically the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993. Key national strategies, plans and agreements for people with disabilities include the New Zealand Disability Strategy and Action Plan, Enabling Good Lives, Whāia Te Ao Mārama 2018 to 2022: The Māori Disability Action Plan, and Faiva Ora 2016–2021: National Pasifika Disability Plan.

With respect to employment, the Working Matters Disability Employment Action Plan lists actions designed to improve the employment outcomes and wellbeing of people who experience disadvantages in labour markets due to disability or health issues. The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for reporting progress on the plan which it does through regular releases of the *Working Matters Dashboard*. Ratified by Aotearoa New Zealand in 2008, Article 27 on work and employment in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires that states recognise that people with disabilities have the right to work, including the right to work in an environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible.

What is the prevalence of disability in Aotearoa New Zealand?

According to the 2013 New Zealand Disability, Survey approximately 1.1 million people, or 24 per cent of the population had a disability, though the incidence is higher amongst tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo. Data for the latest New Zealand Disability Survey were collected in 2023 immediately after the census and will be released over the course of 2024.

What do we know about disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand?

While many disabled people live full lives, others experience significant disparities:

> Disabled people die earlier, have twice the unemployment rate of non-disabled people, are more likely to report inadequate housing conditions, have insufficient money for basic necessities or healthcare, and are overrepresented in the care and protection, youth justice, and corrections populations.[4]

Several structural issues affect disabled people's full participation in employment, including societal attitudes, transport, housing, digital inequity and the general devaluation of disabled people. These inequitable systems and their complex interactions mean that workers with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty, poor housing, un- and under-employment and social exclusion.

What do we know about tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo?

Tāngata whaikaha Māori are less likely than non-disabled Māori to be in the labour force, and those who are in the labour force have higher rates of unemployment. They also have lower income, greater likelihood of damp, cold and inadequate housing, higher rates of discrimination

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[4] Disabled People's Organisations Coalition, the Ombudsman, and the Human Rights Commission, 2022, p. 21.

and lower rates of self-assessed health compared to other Māori. Historically, Māori have been given neither the right nor the resources needed to exercise tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) to address these inequalities. Poor outcomes for tagata sa'ilimalo are evident across a range of social indicators, including healthcare access and treatment, employment and housing. These outcomes are often compounded when tagata sa'ilimalo are also members of other marginalised groups.

Why does employment matter for individuals?

Employment is considered a fundamental human right. Everyone, regardless of their disability status, has the right to work, to freely choose their employment, to work in just conditions and to be protected against unemployment. Employment is also associated with a range of benefits for disabled and non-disabled workers, including improved physical and mental health, and better wellbeing overall. Other benefits include a greater sense of autonomy, reduced depression and anxiety symptoms, broader social networks and inclusion, as well as a sense of accomplishment. It is also critical for disabled people's economic wellbeing across the lifespan, which in turn has a significant impact on many other life domains.

What benefits accrue to business from the employment of disabled people?

The benefits of employment accrue to individual businesses too. Research undertaken in 2018 by global professional services company Accenture concluded that the 45 companies they classified as 'Disability Inclusion Champions' achieved, on average, 28 per cent higher revenue, double the net income and 30 per cent higher economic profit margins over the four-year period they analysed. A follow up study published in 2023 found that in the previous five years, companies that led on key disability inclusion criteria realised 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income, and twice the economic profit as other participants in their annual benchmark survey.

What benefits accrue to economies through the employment of disabled people?

Economies as a whole also profit from the employment of disabled workers through decreases in the costs of un- and under-employment and financial and productivity gains. A 2011 study in Australia by Deloitte Access Economics calculated that closing the gap between the labour market participation and unemployment rates of people with and without disabilities by one-third would result in an increase in GDP[5] of $43 billion AUD over the decade 2011-2021. Three similar studies have been undertaken here in Aotearoa New Zealand. Krassoi Peach in 2016 estimated a potential net gain to the Aotearoa New Zealand economy of over $1.1 billion NZD per year. Similarly, in 2017, NZIER[6] calculated a fiscal benefit of $1.45 billion NZD if the labour force participation rates of people with and without disabilities were equalised, while Malatest International in 2016 estimated the opportunity cost to the government from the exclusion of disabled people from the workforce at $11.7 billion NZD.

What do we know about the employment of disabled people?

Employment is a basic human right that confers significant economic and other benefits to disabled people, to communities and to the economy. Despite this, people with disabilities still experience inequitable access to work opportunities here in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere.

Disabled people encounter significant barriers to finding and staying in employment. They have substantially lower employment rates and higher unemployment rates than non-disabled people; are less likely to be in full-time employment; have lower relative income levels and a greater possibility of living in poverty. An individual's disability status can also inhibit their opportunities for success, fair compensation and fulfilment once in the workplace. In addition, disabled people experience other employment disadvantages, including disproportionate employment in part-time, seasonal, contract-based, and precarious jobs; greater likelihood of holding entry-level

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[5] Gross Domestic Product What Is Gross Domestic Product (GDP)? (thebalancemoney.com) (Amadeo, 2022).

[6] New Zealand Institute of Economic Research https://www.nzier.org.nz/.

positions with fewer opportunities for professional or economic advancement; and a higher risk of involuntary job loss and being laid off during recessions. In short:

> An individual's disability status often poses a detrimental barrier to their employment and career growth opportunities, exacerbates existing workplace disparities, and has significant social, psychological, and economic consequences. For instance, after controlling for education and impact of disability on performance, research reveals pay disparities among employees with disabilities and their non-disabled coworkers; and that disability status led to biased performance evaluations, lower job security, and negative treatment by management.[7]

Comparisons between disabled and non-disabled people, while illustrative of a range of employment-related inequities, hide the substantial diversity in labour market participation and employment outcomes related to the nature and severity of disabled people's impairments. In other words, it is as important to examine differences *within* disability communities as it is to understand differences between disabled and non-disabled people.

What are the significant barriers and enablers to the employment of disabled people?

How are barriers and enablers to employment presented in the literature review?

The framework used in this review to categorise the barriers and enablers of employment for disabled people is called the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) Environmental Domains and comprises five categories.

Category One: Products and technology/natural environment and human-made changes to environment

Barriers in this category include the lack of physical accessibility and the perceived costs associated with making accommodations to manage this; the lack of flexible work options and assistive technology; inflexible and unreliable public transport; and in some cases, inadequate

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[7] Chordiya, 2022, p. 63.

lighting and temperature in work settings. Enablers include making accommodations that meet an employee's needs such as providing dual monitors or computerised phones and alarms; as well as following the [principles of Universal Design](#); implementing flexible work policies like working from home; and access to adequate transportation, either public or private.

Category Two: Support and relationships

Family members, especially parents, play an important role in finding and keeping employment for younger disabled people. The main barriers in this area are a lack of social support, including the perception of low support from parents, though high parental support, or overprotective parents, present even greater barriers. The social networks around the disabled person can either enable employment by fostering higher expectations, broadening horizons and connecting into employment and other opportunities, or shut down possibilities through their low expectations. Parents' lack of time, awareness and knowledge of abilities, parental fatigue and an unwillingness to assist with job searches are also barriers.

Social support from peers and co-workers is a key enabler of employment. Engagement in work was also facilitated in inclusive workplaces where interaction between workers is encouraged, for example by prompting co-workers and managers to invite employees to socialise during breaks, lunches and while working. Management styles identified as enablers include those who build relationships and create a strong sense of teamwork, those who have direct contact with their employees; and those who treat disabled employees equally, valuing their skills and opinions. Employer readiness is also critical; a key component of this is a willingness to be flexible through the recruitment process and beyond.

Category Three: Attitudes

Employer ignorance, prejudice and stigma are considered significant barriers to the recruitment and retention of disabled people. According to Bartram and Cavanagh (2019, p. 346):

> … we are simply not equipping contemporary managers with the knowledge, skills and abilities and more importantly the confidence to engage in disability employment and effective management. As part of the education of current managers and the next generation of managers it is vitally important that we break down the misconceptions of employing workers with disability and the often-misguided fears of managers about the potential for 'problems' associated with disability employment.

Employer upskilling to address ignorance, prejudice and stigma, often referred to as the development of 'disability confidence', is considered an important enabler of employment for disabled people. Disability confident employers are able to create inclusive and accessible workplaces for their employees and their customers or clients. Disability awareness includes myth- and stereotype-busting, sharing evidence-based knowledge about disability and the experiences of disabled people, as well as the contributions that disabled people make to society.

Five common myths and their respective facts[8] are:

Myth	Fact
Employing disabled people is expensive.	Accommodating disabled employees costs no more than supporting non-disabled workers.
Disabled employees have a high turnover rate.	Disabled employees remain with an employer an average of four months longer than non-disabled workers.
Disabled workers do not fit in.	Organisational benefits of having disabled workers on staff include the value of new creative skills, the increase in disability awareness, and a conscious, positive change in overall workplace inclusion.
The productivity of disabled workers is lower.	Productivity is actually a benefit of hiring disabled people.
Disabled workers present a higher risk of injury.	The presence of disabled workers in fact improves workplace safety.

Category Four: Services, systems and policies

Barriers internal to organisations include a lack of management support for recruiting disabled people, the lack of disability awareness training, and a scarcity of manager/employer experience working with people with different types of disabilities. Other barriers involve complex procedures to obtain and implement accommodations; inflexible allocation of resources; lengthy, bureaucratic processes; and organisations' lack of understanding of their own policies and processes and how to implement them.

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[8] From Sheppard, 2023.

Internal organisational enablers include disability-inclusive recruitment practices, and the provision of disability awareness and training, flexible work settings and schedules, timely accommodations, adequate supervision and appropriate training, and the provision of ongoing support, clear job descriptions and expectations. Organisational cultures that support individuals in both work and non-work areas; and provide guidance on company policies, protocols and culture are also enabling of safe and engaging work environments for disabled workers.

A scarcity of accessible employment and professional support are significant barriers external to organisations, while providing career pathways for disabled people, and providing employment for them that matches their strengths and abilities are enablers that facilitate the contributions disabled people can make to an organization or work environment.

Category Five: Other contextual factors

The individual circumstances of disabled people, such as financial advantages, educational opportunities, and opportunities to contribute to the community in activities such as volunteering are enablers in this category. The corollary of this is that a lack of previous work experience and lower levels of education are barriers to successful, fulfilling work for disabled people. Additional barriers include organisational cultures in which workers feel pressured to mask their disabilities or other marginalised identities; a history of failure in getting and keeping jobs, as well as abuse, bullying and trauma. Fear of disclosure is also a barrier, both to finding and keeping a job, while supporting disclosure is considered a critical enabler of better employment outcomes for disabled people.

Barriers and enablers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)[9]

Barriers	Enablers
Concerns about legal and ethical risks, particularly if the arrangement does not work out.	Ongoing specialist employee and employer support for SMEs throughout recruitment and employment processes, potentially through industry associations or other trusted sources.
The time and complexities involved in applying for funding for workplace modifications or wage subsidies.	Better information and advice around how to hire a person with disability and job match skills and experience, for example, a simple classification system for employers on different impairments and the potential modifications or additional supports that might be required to support them at work.
Many employers are unsure about how to deal with different impairments because of a limited understanding of disability and the varied supports required.	Streamline the application and approval process for financial assistance from government for workplace adjustments and wage assistance.
A lack of easily accessible information and advice about how to hire a disabled worker.	Provide clearer information and advice around an SMEs legal responsibilities and obligations related to employing a person with a disability. Ideally the information should be industry- and workplace-specific.
Concerns over the cost and time involved with workplace accommodations.	Produce more case studies, videos and examples of other small business experiences when hiring a person with a disability. It is motivating for SMEs to see how others are making it work in their business/industry, which creates a positive 'can-do' attitude.

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[9] Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, 89 Degrees East, & Truth-Serum, 2018.

What do we know about disabled workers in our industries?

Resources on disabled people's employment in Waihanga Ara Rau and Hanga-Aro-Rau industries is scarce. Construction and engineering were the most developed areas and manufacturing the least, while resources on disabled workers in infrastructure and logistics as stand-alone categories were negligible and do not feature in the summaries that follow.

Construction and Infrastructure

Although the construction sector is the largest employer in the world and faces significant skills shortages globally, it has struggled to increase the diversity of its workforce, including raising the number and proportion of disabled employees. Disability employment research in the construction industry is in its infancy and has significant knowledge gaps regarding barriers to employment based on the lived experiences of people with disability; methodological gaps including the need for more construction research design to include people with disability as research participants as well as research investigators; as well as gaps regarding disclosure, from the points of view of both disabled people and construction employers.

Overall, while some research in construction identifies barriers to employment for disabled people, and describes the stigma attached to disabled identities, there are fewer studies on the kinds of enablers that can overcome these entrenched barriers. The barriers described in these articles include physical obstacles and inaccessible workplace settings; the traditionally male and able-bodied workforce of self-employed contractors; inflexible employment conditions; the practice of recruiting tradesmen from contractors' established, narrow social networks; and assumptions about disabled people, including that they cannot work long hours, increase the cost of supervision and have health needs that will impact on productivity and absenteeism. Stigma and discrimination, concerns about the equality and fairness of workplaces and systems, non-disclosure of disability, and a general lack of awareness and understanding of disability are also considered barriers.

Enablers, on the other hand, include:

> …creating early intervention, education and training frameworks aimed at changing attitudes towards disability; developing targeted marketing campaigns for specific employers; identifying alternative or different work options for people with disability; and adapting government programs, systems and legislation to overcome existing barriers.[10]

Manufacturing

Resources on the employment of disabled people in the manufacturing sector are scarce and fall into one of two categories: web-based and focused on good practice examples, or academic articles centred on the development of assistance systems to increase the inclusion of disabled people into manufacturing systems.

Engineering

Comparatively little is known about the experiences of disabled engineering students and disabled engineers, though what is understood from early research is that they face a variety of constraints, burdens, stereotypes, and discriminatory treatment in the profession. Recently published research concludes that:

> … students with physical disabilities and mental illness, and professionals with physical disabilities and chronic and mental illness, encountered persistently more negative treatment by their peers than engineering students and professionals without these forms of disability. Persistence intentions were lower on average among engineering students and professionals with disabilities compared to their peers, and this was partly accounted for by their greater exposure to social exclusion and professional devaluation in their classrooms and workplaces.[11]

Enablers of better outcomes for engineers and engineering students include easy-to-access and de-stigmatised accommodations, regular reminders of how and where accommodations can be accessed, and the inclusion of disability as a standalone category in an organisation's diversity, equity

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[10] University of Technology Sydney, 2023.

[11] Cech, 2023, p. 479.

and inclusion policies. Employers should provide structured opportunities such as staff networks and/or reference groups for disabled employees to build community and allyship. Disabled engineers should be 'designers with' rather than 'designed for'.

Where to from here?

The primary research being undertaken by [All is for All](#) will fill a number of critical spaces in the scholarship on disability and employment in Aotearoa New Zealand, and together with this integrative literature review, provide a foundation for Disability Action Plans for Hanga-Aro-Rau and Waihanga Ara Rau, and promote employment for disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo that aligns with their skills and interests and is meaningful, stable, reliable and inclusive.

There are many possibilities for future primary research on the disability employment kaupapa, particularly in the context of the current and imminent changes associated with demographic change, Industry 4.0, increased automation and artificial intelligence. Research will also be critical to avoid replicating and embedding in the future the inequities disabled people currently experience across social, economic and health domains.

Irrespective of whether the responsibility for ensuring that industry voice has a meaningful influence on skills and workforce development falls to Workforce Development Councils or some other organisation, there will still be a need to understand the education and training component of employment for disabled people. With this information need in mind, subsequent literature reviews could focus on transitions, for example between school and vocational education and employment; on the factors that contribute to the success of disabled people in vocational education, including work-based learning; and on the kinds of programmes that support disabled people and their employers from pre-recruitment through to retention.

An exploration of indigenous models of disability would also be a valuable resource, given Aotearoa New Zealand's settler colonial history; the inequities currently experienced by tāngata whaikaha Māori, and the absence of holism and/or collectivism in the models of disability from which policy and practice are developed here.

Contents

Introduction

This integrative literature review[12] is a component of the Disabled People, Tāngata Whaikaha Māori and Tagata Sa'ilimalo Research Project being undertaken by Hanga-Aro-Rau (HAR) and Waihanga Ara Rau (WAR) Workforce Development Councils (WDCs). This Research Project will provide a foundation of evidence for the development of a Disability Action Plan for HAR and WAR, with the overall twin objectives of improving accessibility across our respective industries; and enabling disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo to have fulfilling work and to be valued for it.

The review's purpose is threefold. Firstly, it will be a resource for *All is for All*,[13] the provider selected to undertake the Disabled People, Tāngata Whaikaha Māori and Tagata Sa'ilimalo Research Project. This research, which involves the collection of primary data in HAR and WAR industries, will identify barriers and enablers of sustainable, fulfilling work for disabled people, and describe employers' and business associations' awareness and experiences of employing disabled people. Secondly, the review will be a resource for kaimahi from both WDCs as they move towards greater disability awareness and responsiveness. Thirdly, it will provide a platform for action, relationship-building and collaboration arising through and from the research.

In order to fulfil the objectives just described, I begin by defining the essential terms and concepts used to write about disability and disabled people in this review. An outline of the contemporary disability landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand follows, focusing on the key agencies and their roles, as well as the significant strategies, plans and agreements that provide the foundation for their work. The next section provides an overview of the disabled community in this country, including a particular focus on tāngata whaikaha Māori, tagata sa'ilimalo and women. While I look primarily at employment and education data and evidence, I also take a deliberately broad view of this topic. There are two reasons for this approach, firstly in recognition of the many spheres

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[12] Integrative literature reviews enable the use of theoretical and empirical scholarship to provide a more complete understanding of a particular issue. These include information produced by academia, governments, non-governmental organisations, service providers, businesses, and industry (Donald Beasley Institute, 2023).

[13] All is for All.

(social and economic, for example) within which disabled people are disadvantaged and how these intersect with and impact each other, and secondly, because of the ways in which this disadvantage can be compounded when disabled people are also members of other marginalised groups.

A review of relevant scholarship on the barriers to and enablers of employment for disabled people is next, focusing mostly on local research undertaken from 2019 onwards, but broadening these geographic and temporal parameters for work that has particular relevance to the research kaupapa. It was necessary, for example, to move beyond Aotearoa New Zealand's geographical boundaries in order to write about barriers and enablers to the employment of disabled workers in HAR and WAR industries. This section covers only those industries with sufficient resources: the construction, manufacturing and engineering sectors. The review concludes by emphasising the potential value of the research being undertaken by All is for All across HAR and WAR sectors - for disabled people, for businesses large and small, and for Aotearoa as a whole.
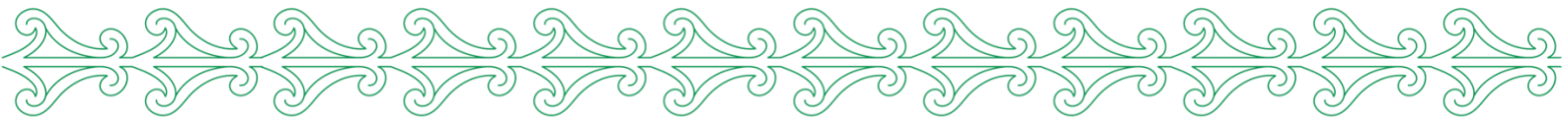
Essential terms and concepts

Almost a quarter of the population of Aotearoa New Zealand is disabled (National Ethics Advisory Committee, 2019; Office for Disability Issues, 2016). This includes people with permanent impairments, those with impairments resulting from long or short-term injury or illness, the Deaf community and people with learning disability/ies, neurodiversity, mental health conditions, physical, sensory and hidden impairments. These impairments often last for six months or more (Office for Disability Issues, 2016; United Nations General Assembly, 2007a).

Māori experience disability at a much higher rate (32 per cent) than the overall New Zealand population (24 per cent) (Hickey & Wilson, 2017; Office for Disability Issues, 2022). The Crown has a dual accountability to address the inequities experienced by tāngata whaikaha Māori, because they are unfair and unjust (sometimes called the needs-based rationale);[14] but also, and more importantly, because of its obligation to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Meares, Stedman, Van Marrewijk & Siakumi Kautoke, 2023). Additional international Crown obligations include the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](hereafter UNCRPD or the Convention) and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.](#)

The New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 notes that "[d]isability is not something individuals have" (Employment New Zealand, 2024a). Instead, it is "the process which happens when one group of people creates barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have" (Employment New Zealand, 2024a; see also National Ethics Advisory Committee, 2019). The experience of disability is also affected by the nature of a person's impairment, which can be intellectual, psychiatric, physical, neurological or sensory, and be temporary, intermittent or ongoing. People may acquire an impairment through accident or illness, and/or be born with one. Multiple impairments are common, especially as people age (Office for Disability Issues, 2022).

The identity-first language used throughout this review, such as 'disabled people' or 'disabled workers', is preferred by many disability organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Perry, Ingham,

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[14] See Curtis, Jones, Tipene-Leach, Walker, Loring, Paine & Reid (2019) for an overview of the 'needs-based' rationale for addressing Māori health inequities.

Jones & Mirfin-Veitch, 2020). This terminology derives from *the social model of disability*, which is based on the idea that social, civic, political, and economic circumstances are disabling, rather than a person's impairment in and of itself (Beales, 2023; Browne & Dorris, 2022; Chordiya, 2022; Flick & McManus, 2022; Hickey & Wilson, 2017; Pacheco, Yoong & Lips, 2021; Tompa, Samosh & Boucher, 2020). This differs from the *medical model* which views disability in terms of what is *wrong* with someone; the underlying assumption here is that impairments or differences should be fixed or cured by medical treatments, even if they cause no pain or illness (Browne & Dorris, 2022).[15]

The *social relational model* of disability also rejects the biological determinism and deficit focus of the medical model, instead understanding disabilities as outcomes of social environments while leaving room for "the corporeal realities of physical, intellectual, or psychological restrictions on activities and experiences" (Cech, 2023, p. 464). *The disability rights model* grew out of the social model of disability and is founded on the notion that disabled people have the same human rights as those that are guaranteed to non-disabled people (Donald Beasley Institute, 2023). Through this affirmation of disabled people's rights, this model conceptualises disability as a natural part of humanity and emphasises the empowerment of disabled people as active participants.

None of these models, however, account for Indigenous worldviews that are holistic and based on the importance of relationships, and collective responsibilities and obligations to others. As Hickey and Wilson (2017, p. 85) explain, "Indigenous people have additional and diverse historical and contemporary impacts of disablement arising from colonisation, societal discourses about racism, subjugation and dysfunction that are in themselves disabling." They go on to propose a model called Whānau Hauā, which is distinct from the social model of disability in that it has an added cultural dimension of whānau working together to restore balance in their lives.

> Whānau Hauā sees disability as a collective endeavour of both the individual and the whānau as a whole. Whānau hauā are driven by a collective effort and the cultural obligations and responsibilities that whānau members have to each other and the whānau as a whole, while they strive to achieve balance within an environment of change and institutional barriers (Hickey & Wilson, 2017, p. 87).

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[15] Watene, Mirfin-Veitch and Asaka (2023) also describe the moral model of disability (disability as divine punishment) and the charity model of disability (disability as tragedy).

Not everyone in the disability community prefers the identity-first language described earlier. Māori, for example, typically identify as Māori first, with collectivism, relational, and holistic cultural values most important to Te Ao Māori (the Māori world) (Perry et al., 2020). Where possible and appropriate, it is advisable to ask for an individual's preference and use the language of their choice.

It is also important to remember that disabled people belong to a range of different groups, have a wide variety of health conditions and live in many different contexts (Earle, 2019). They are Māori, Pacific and/or Pākehā, or from one of Aotearoa New Zealand's many other ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups; they are part of LGBTQIA+ communities, they are migrants, at-risk youth and older people (Office for Disability Issues, 2016). The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), can be helpful in understanding that disabled people's diverse identities can lead to compounding experiences of discrimination and privilege (Beatty, Baldridge, Boehm, Kulkarni & Colella, 2019; Donald Beasley Institute, 2023; Flick & McManus, 2022; Hickey & Wilson, 2017; Matada Research Group, 2022; National Ethics Advisory Committee, 2019; Office for Disability Issues, 2022; Tompa et al., 2020).

As explained in the Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People Annual Report (2023a, p. 214):

> The experience of disability is influenced by the nature of a person's impairment. Gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and culture can also have a profound, and sometimes compounding, effect on an individual's experience of disability. Disabled people are part of the vast and diverse human experience. Just as we accept and respect differences like gender, ethnicity, language or belief, the difference and diversity of disabled people needs to be understood, acknowledged and celebrated.

The terms *disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori* (to refer to Māori people with disabilities) are used in this review and in our respective organisations (Perry et al., 2020; Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, n.d.). Similarly, I use *tagata sa'ilimalo* when referring to Pacific disabled communities in Aotearoa (Donald Beasley Institute, 2023; Ministry of Health, 2023; Tōfā Mamao, 2023; Vaka Tautua, 2022). Note that references to 'disabled people' include tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo where the latter are not referenced specifically.

'Whaikaha' was first used by Maaka Tibble, a Ngāti Porou kaumatua, who has worked in the disability world for decades, including as a founding member of the Māori Disability Leadership Group. Maaka Tibble is quoted as saying "Tāngata Whaikaha means people who are determined

to do well or is certainly a goal that they reach for. It fits nicely with the goals and aims of people with disabilities who are determined in some way to do well and create opportunities for themselves as opposed to being labelled, as in the past" (Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, n.d.). Tagata sa'ilimalo is both a vision and, when written in lower case, an identity, developed by the Tōfā Mamao Collective (Tōfā Mamao, 2023). It comes from the Samoan 'tagata' (person or people) and 'sa'ilimalo' (pursuit of success) and can be singular or plural (Ministry of Health, 2023; Tōfā Mamao, 2023; Vaka Tautua, 2022).

Two final concepts are essential to a nuanced understanding of disability – ableism and disablism. While both are forms of discrimination, ableism is *discrimination that favours non-disabled people*, while disablism is discrimination against disabled people (Dixon, Kendall, Kelly & Chapman, 2023). Examples of ableism include a building designed without a ramp or a lift; or a meeting without the option to attend virtually, or without captions for those who require them. It can also be seen in teachers and other professionals' desire to normalise or 'cure' disabilities rather than focusing on and valuing their uniqueness (Nieminen, 2023). Disablism, on the other hand, manifests in the negative treatment of disabled individuals or groups (Wolbring, 2012) through acts of discrimination and/or abuse, such as those experienced by disabled adults and children, as described during the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care.

Overview of the contemporary disability landscape

Key agencies and their roles

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) was established within the Ministry of Social Development in 2002. Its role was to focus on disability issues across government and to lead the implementation and monitoring of the New Zealand Disability Strategy which is discussed in more detail in the next section (Watene et al., 2023; Office for Disability Issues, 2016). The ODI is now part of Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People (hereafter Whaikaha), which was established in July 2022 as a Departmental Agency hosted by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) (Ministry of Social Development, 2023a; Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, 2023a). Whaikaha brought together the functions and people from the Disability Directorate in Manatū Hauora (Ministry of Health), the Office for Disability Issues,[16] and the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) [17] sites in Christchurch, Waikato, and Mid-Central (Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, 2023a). In September 2023, the then Labour Government announced that Whaikaha had secured funding to continue the transformation of the disability system in line with the Enabling Good Lives approach (Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People, 2023b).

Whaikaha leads the coordination of the Government's response to the 60 recommendations made by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) when they examined Aotearoa New Zealand in September 2022 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, n.d.). The CRPD was concerned about two areas of work and employment. The first was the low rate, compared with the general population, of labour force participation, and the low rate of employment of persons with disabilities in the open labour market. The second area concerned the continued segregated employment programmes for persons with disabilities ("business enterprises") and the use of minimum wage exemption permits (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2022).

[16] Content on this site is currently being migrated to Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People
[17] EGL was developed by leaders in the disability community; it is a social movement that is focused on shifting the balance of power and authority from the government to disabled people

https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/

More broadly, the CRPD was concerned about the underrepresentation of tāngata whaikaha Māori in legislative and policy processes to implement the Convention, and recommended the development of:

> … legislative and policy frameworks that reflect the Treaty of Waitangi, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to ensure that Māori persons with disabilities are closely consulted and actively involved in decision-making processes and that their right to self-determination is recognized (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2022, p. 2).

Whaikaha work across Government with the relevant agencies to respond to CRPD recommendations, 51 of which the Government has now agreed to implement (Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People, 2023a).

Whaikaha is also working with Statistics New Zealand on the CRPD's recommendation that Aotearoa New Zealand develop a national disability data framework. The Disability Data and Evidence Advisory Group,[18] co-facilitated by Statistics New Zealand and Whaikaha, is working with representatives from across central government, as well as Disabled People's Organisations and the disability sector, to create a structure that supports the collection and dissemination of quality disability data. This work has already resulted in an increasing number of government surveys collecting disability data (Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, 2023a).

In addition to hosting Whaikaha, the Ministry of Social Development also supports disabled people into work through the Oranga Mahi suite of programmes (Ministry of Social Development, 2023a; 2023b). These include Individual Placement and Support (IPS), a health and employment service for people managing severe mental health conditions; *E Ara E Take Charge* - an IPS service adapted specifically for young people aged 18-24 with common mental health and addiction issues; *Here Toitū* - a health and employment service that helps people get well and

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[18] The Disability Data and Evidence Working Group (DDEWG) devolved in 2023 into The Disability Data and Evidence Advisory Group and the Disability Data and Evidence Community of Practice. There is at this point no updated website presence for either rōpū (M. Gezentsvey, personal communication, September 13, 2023).

find meaningful work; *Rākau Rangatira* - a Kaupapa Māori service for people with mild to moderate mental health and addiction issues; and a virtual mentoring service called *Whitiki Tāua* that connects participants to a mentor for up to 12 months (Ministry of Social Development, 2023a; 2023b). They also support disabled people into sustainable employment through their Specialist Employment Service, where employers are paid directly for internships and support funds to meet any additional costs disabled people can face when undertaking training or employment (Ministry of Social Development, 2023b).

The Lead Toolkit (Hawker, 2017a, b, c, d; Hawker 2020 & Hawker 2021) is designed to support leaders, managers and human resource professionals to foster an inclusive environment for disabled people (Ministry of Social Development, n.d.b). It contains a toolkit, a public sector network called We Enable Us, as well as a central repository of information and support for employing disabled people. It is currently being updated and the latest version will be published online in the second half of 2024.[19]

The current Lead Toolkit has a range of resources, including the following:

- Practical steps for managers: Reasonable Accommodation
- Interviewing disabled people: A guide to help employers prepare for interviews
- Lead Toolkit for employing disabled people
- Practical tips for people managers: a guide to working effectively with disabled employees
- Retaining existing employees: advice for line managers
- Reasonable Accommodation: A guide to developing policies and procedures to assist disabled people through reasonable (workplace adjustments)
- Recently updated guidance on reasonable accommodation for disabled people and for organisations is provided by New Zealand's Independent Monitoring Mechanism[20] which consists of the Disabled People's Organisations Coalition, the Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman (2023).

In addition, MSD (n.d.c) publishes a checklist for assessing an organisation's ability to attract and retain disabled people.

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[19] S. Eriksen, personal communication, January 12, 2024.

[20] Established under Article 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Disability Convention) (2007).

HAR and WAR work closely and collaboratively with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, which is delivering its inaugural Disability Action Plan (NZQA, (2024). This focuses on partnerships, data, providing accessible information, and building the confidence and skills of staff working with and for disabled people (NZQA, 2023). NZQA also supported the Disabled Tertiary Population Survey, research led by the National Disabled Students' Association (Beales, Mills Workman & McLeod, 2023), and comprised a literature review (Beales, 2023), survey and focus groups. The purpose of the study was to better understand the lived experience of disabled learners currently enrolled in tertiary education in Aotearoa. NZQA is running a trial in secondary schools as a response to a key finding of the literature review, that the need to repeatedly disclose medical information is a barrier to learners receiving support (NZQA, 2023).

Employment New Zealand, part of the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, provides a range of information to employers but also to disabled jobseekers and employees (Employment New Zealand, 2024b). This includes definitions of disability; the benefits of being a disability confident organisation, and how to become one; how to hire and retain disabled employees; information about financial help and wages; and the resources and government support available for employees and jobseekers. They also have a very useful page listing both national and international disability information and resources for employers (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2021).

Work and Income (n.d.a) provide advice and support when organisations employ a disabled person or a person with a health condition. They publish a list of Employment Service Providers that can assist disabled people to find work if they are in the Ministry of Social Development's Employment Service or Mainstream Employment Programmes (Work and Income, n.d.c). They can also help with job search and potentially workplace costs for disabled people and those with health conditions (Work and Income, n.d.b).

The New Zealand Disability Employers Network (2023a) is a collective of employers committed to improving disability inclusion and accessibility practices in their own organisations and across Aotearoa New Zealand. This organisation is also home to the Accessibility Tick programme (New Zealand Disability Employers Network, 2023b).

Disability Information New Zealand (n.d.) is a service provided by members of the New Zealand Federation of Disability Information Centres. They provide information over the phone, electronically, or face to face, on various areas of life, including employment.

Workbridge (2023) supports jobseekers with disabilities or health conditions, as well as employers and workplaces across the country, with more than 75 employment consultants in 22 centres nationwide. Services to both employers and disabled people are free. Services to employers (Workbridge, n.d.) include job matching; advice on interviews and making the recruitment process accessible; assistance to access funding for disability-related costs; support with induction, on-site training and making reasonable accommodation; and post-placement support for up to a year or longer if required. Just Say Yes (2023) is a consulting practice and division of Workbridge that specialises in professional services to business and policy advice to government.

Be Lab's (2019a) employment service connects access citizens with job opportunities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. They run the New Start 16-week paid work experience programme (2019b) and the Tertiary Internship Programme (2019c). The organisation also provides a number of services for businesses including advice on leadership and culture, on-site assessment, talent and employment, event planning, design planning and digital assessment. Their tools and resources for business include case studies, a starter package, top tips and resources, and a business network (2019d).

Deaf Aotearoa is a national organisation and service provider for Deaf people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Their employment service assists Deaf and hard-of-hearing people to get and keep a job. It also helps employers to understand Deaf people and their culture, and shows them how to access funding for New Zealand Sign Language interpreters in the workplace.

Workwise is an employment support service for people facing personal or health challenges; they provide services both to people seeking work, and to their prospective employers. For employers, they suggest people on their books for interview, pre-screen candidates, hold information sessions and provide premises for interviews – at no cost. For jobseekers, they help establish work preferences and create employment goals, co-create a plan to achieve those goals, and sort out any problems the jobseeker foresees in returning to work. On-going support can be provided for as long as it is needed.

Catapult also provides services to employers and job seekers who live with a disability or health condition in the Waitaha Canterbury region. For people with disabilities aged 16 to 64, employment services are provided at no cost for up to one year. Recruitment, reference and

police checks, and on-the-job coaching for new staff are also free. Comcare also provides employment and a range of other services to people with mental health or addiction issues in the Waitaha Canterbury region. Their Jobconnect service provides employment support, advice and information to job seekers and employers, as well as advice on suitable training options for those job seekers wishing to update their skills.

AutismNZ's Employment Support Programme is available in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington for job seekers and employees with autism, as well as employers. The service focuses on pre-employment coaching and in-work support for the employee and the employer. Their Transition from School Service also assists students in their last year of school into post-school education, employment and/or community services and activities.

The Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (n.d.) is a not-for-profit pan-impairment Disabled People's Organisation run by and for disabled people. They drive systemic change through leadership; informing and advising on policies; supporting disabled people to have a voice; and monitoring and giving feedback on existing laws, policies and practices about, and relevant to, disabled people. Their Resources for Employers (Disabled Persons Assembly New Zealand, 2023b) document provides useful definitions, issues and resources for employers in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Legislation, strategies, plans and agreements

Disability rights in Aotearoa New Zealand are addressed through human rights legislation, specifically the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990 and the Human Rights Act 1993. Section 21(1)(h) of the latter Act makes discrimination based on disability, without lawful justification, unlawful. Section 21(1)(h) of the act defines disability as: (1) physical disability or impairment, (2) physical illness, (3) Psychiatric illness, (4) intellectual or psychological disability or impairment, (5) any other loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function, (6) reliance on a guide dog, wheelchair, or other remedial means, and (7) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing illness (such as HIV or hepatitis). New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026

The New Zealand Disability Strategy (Office for Disability Issues, 2016) guides the work of government agencies on disability issues. Priorities for change are expressed as eight outcomes: education, employment and economic security, health and wellbeing, rights protection and justice, accessibility, attitudes, choice and control, and leadership. Hanga-Aro-Rau and Waihanga Ara Rau's work falls under outcomes one and two: education, and employment and economic security.

Aotearoa New Zealand's first Disability Strategy, launched in 2001, was challenged for its monocultural application, despite its recognition of the specific needs of disabled Māori in Objective 11 (Watene et al., 2023). It was nonetheless regarded as socially progressive when it was released because of both its content and the way it was developed. Unique in its time, it embraced the social model and challenged existing ways of thinking about disability, as a divine punishment (moral model), for example, or as a tragedy (charity model) or an individual pathological problem (medical model) (Watene et al., 2023).

Disability Action Plan 2019-2023 (Office for Disability Issues, 2019a)
Work programmes for each of the eight outcomes of the New Zealand Disability Strategy are described in this document, with disability data listed as a cross-cutting theme. The Review of Vocational Education (Careerforce, 2023), now known as RoVE, is listed as a work programme under the education outcome, while the Disability Employment Action Plan (Office for Disability Issues, 2019a) is included under objective two. According to this table, a new Disability Action Plan (2023-2026) was scheduled to be agreed by Cabinet in 2023 (Office for Disability Issues, 2019b).

Working Matters Disability Employment Action Plan
This plan (Ministry of Social Development, 2020) lists actions designed to improve the employment outcomes and wellbeing of people who experience disadvantages in labour markets due to disability or health issues (including physical, sensory, learning, neurological, and mental health related issues) that may be visible, hidden, permanent, temporary, acquired or experienced from birth. The Action Plan is also for people who experience multiple disadvantages in labour markets related to other marginalised identities they hold (refer to the concept of intersectionality defined earlier). In order to address this, the plan will align with employment action plans for Māori, Pacific Peoples, refugees, recent migrants and ethnic communities, older people and young people. The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for reporting progress on the plan which it does through regular releases of the Working Matters Dashboard (2021b; 2023b).

Enabling Good Lives

Enabling Good Lives (EGL) is a partnership between the disability sector and government agencies; its purpose is the long-term transformation of the way that disabled people and their whānau are supported to live everyday lives (Enabling Good Lives, 2024a). Developed in 2011 by members of the disability community, the EGL principles and approach are a foundation and framework to guide positive change for disabled people, families, communities and governance structures. It has eight core principles and a vision based on respect towards disabled people and their families, and is based on the premise that that disabled people and their families can bring about positive change when they have access to and control over resources, and access to an independent ally (Enabling Good Lives, 2024b).

New Zealand Sign Language Strategy 2018-2023

The purpose of the Strategy (Ministry of Social Development, 2019) is to enable Deaf and other New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) users to learn and use the language naturally within a community of users, contributing significantly to its survival, sustainability and vitality.

Whāia Te Ao Mārama 2018 to 2022: The Māori Disability Action Plan

Whāia Te Ao Mārama 2018 to 2022: The Māori Disability Action Plan (Ministry of Health, 2018) was developed with more than 200 disabled Māori, whānau and service providers (Hickey & Wilson, 2017) and is a tikanga based approach to support tāngata whaikaha Māori (Ministry of Health, 2018). The plan includes six goals for achievement by 2022: that disabled Māori will participate in the development of health and disability services; have control over their disability support; participate in Te Ao Māori; participate in their community; receive disability support services that are responsive to Te Ao Māori; and live in informed and responsive communities. The goals were designed to address the difficulties faced by disabled Māori highlighted in the Māori Health Disability Statistical Report (Himona, Talamaivao, Yeh & Paterson, 2019).

[Faiva Ora 2016–2021: National Pasifika Disability Plan](#)

Addressing the inequities experienced by Pasifika disabled people requires the collective efforts of Pasifika disabled people themselves, their families, Pasifika communities, disability services and government agencies (Ministry of Health, 2017). This concept reflects the spirit of Faiva Ora, which is to work together to solve the challenges experienced by Pasifika disabled people and their families (Ministry of Health, 2017). Whaikaha is co-developing a [National Pacific Disability Plan](#) with Pacific communities and is currently engaging with Pacific disabled people and their families via talanoa and an online survey (Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, 2024). See also the [Tagata Sa'ilimalo Strategic Framework (Tōfā Mamao, 2023)](#), developed by the [Tōfā Mamao Collective](#) (2024) which is an independent national non-profit led entirely by tagata sa'ilimalo.

[Te Pūkenga Strategic Disability Action Plan](#)

The aim of the Strategic Disability Action Plan (Te Pūkenga, 2022) is to address the eight key barriers for disabled ākonga identified in the Te Rito Report for Disabled Learners (Te Pūkenga, 2021) over 3-5 years. See also [Rautaki Ōritetanga me te Angitu Ākonga Equity and Ākonga Success Strategy 2023–2033 (Te Pūkenga, n.d.)](#).

International Agreements

This convention was ratified by Aotearoa New Zealand in 2008, and is founded on the following general principles (United Nations, 2007a):

- Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
- Non-discrimination
- Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
- Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality between men and women
- Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

More specifically, Article 27 on work and employment requires that states that have ratified the Convention recognise that people with disabilities have the right to work, including the right to work in an environment that is open, inclusive, and accessible (Mark, Hofmayer, Rauch & Matt, 2019; United Nations, 2007a).

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[21] [This infographic](#) shows accountability mechanisms, cross-cutting issues, outcomes and work programmes for the UNCRPD, the New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 and the Disability Action Plan 2019-2023 (Office for Disability Issues, 2019a).

Disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand

Disability, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), is integral to the human experience (2023). They estimate that 1.3 billion people worldwide, or 16 per cent of the global population, experience a significant disability and associated inequities including stigma, discrimination, poverty, and exclusion from education and employment (WHO, 2023). When the prevalence of disability was measured here via the 2013 New Zealand Disability Survey (Statistics New Zealand, 2015), approximately 1.1 million people, or 24 per cent of the population, had a disability, making it the largest minority group (Perry et al., 2020). The prevalence among Māori and Pacific peoples is higher than average (Statistics New Zealand, 2014); the wellbeing of tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo will be discussed in more detail below. Data for the latest New Zealand Disability survey were collected in 2023 and will be released over the course of 2024.

While many disabled people live full and productive lives, others experience significant disparities (Beltran-Castillon & McLeod, 2023; Van Dalen, 2019). The New Zealand Productivity Commission (2023) identify disabled people as one of several groups that experience persistent disadvantage. Overall, as the Disabled People's Organisations Coalition, the Ombudsman, and the Human Rights Commission (2022, p. 21) conclude:

> Disabled people die earlier, have twice the unemployment rate of non-disabled people, are more likely to report inadequate housing conditions, have insufficient money for basic necessities or healthcare, and are overrepresented in the care and protection, youth justice, and corrections populations.

The results of the Youth19 survey, for example, show that 36 per cent of the 671 young people with disabilities (from 49 Auckland, Northland and Waikato schools and kura kaupapa Māori) face housing deprivation (needing to sleep or live in challenging conditions due to housing costs) compared to 28 per cent of those without disabilities. They also faced difficulties accessing healthcare and were more likely to experience ethnic discrimination while accessing this care (Clark, Kuresa, Drayton, King-Finau & Fleming, 2021).

Looking specifically at employment and life outcomes, using data from the Household Labour Force Survey 2022 (Statistics New Zealand, 2023a):

- 42 per cent of disabled working age people (aged 15-64) were employed, compared to 80 per cent of non-disabled people.
- Of those who were not in paid employment, 74 per cent of disabled people said they would like to work if a job were available (this data is again from the 2013 Disability Survey).
- Just under one third of disabled young people are not in employment, education and training, compared to 10 per cent of their non-disabled counterparts.
- Disabled people who are also members of other marginalised groups such as Māori, Pacific peoples and LGBTQI+ communities are more likely to have poorer outcomes than their non-disabled peers.
- The median income for disabled people both in and out of the labour market is $451 per week, while for non-disabled people it is $1000.
- While there was an increase of $36 per week in median income for disabled workers in the two years between June 2020 and June 2022, over the same timeframe the increase for non-disabled people was $126 per week (Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, 2023a).

Turning to education, again using data from the 2013 Disability Survey, disabled people aged 16 to 64 were twice as likely to have no school qualifications as non-disabled people. In addition, disabled adults generally had lower-level school qualifications than non-disabled people (Earle, 2019). Disabled students were more likely to be enrolled in foundation tertiary education (Level 1 to 3 certificates), about as likely to be enrolled in vocational education, including in industry training (Levels 4 to 7 non-degree) and less likely to be enrolled in degree level and above compared to non-disabled students (Earle, 2019). Around a third of disabled people who were not in study and said they would like to be in the future, believed they would be limited by the types of courses available or by the amount of study they could do (Earle, 2019). Although disabled students are equally likely to complete their qualifications as their non-disabled peers, once they enter the labour market they earn less (Tertiary Education Commission, n.d.).

Based on results from a survey (n=235) and focus groups (with 10 participants), the Let's Get Accessible project[22] examined the lived experience of disabled students across the tertiary education system, including students in vocational education (Smith, 2024). Key findings from

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[22] A collaborative project of the Ministry of Education, the National Disabled Students Association, the Tertiary Education Commission and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

this work are that it can be difficult for disabled students to access support; that levels of support are inconsistent; that students are socially excluded due to ableism, inaccessibility and a lack of disability confidence amongst staff at their respective institutions; and that advocacy can be unsafe, ineffective or unsupportive because of power differences between students, teaching staff and providers.[23]

Looking specifically at vocational education and training (VET), disabled learners (along with Māori and Pacific learners and those with low prior education) are not consistently provided with the learning and wellbeing support they need to complete their qualifications and/or have strong employment outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2021). In the briefing to the then Minister of Education about the learner success component of Unified Funding System, the authors begin their summary of the problems for disabled learners in the VET system by noting that the data on disabled learners is old and based on only a small group of disabled people. An analysis of that data shows that disabled people participated in VET at slightly lower rates than non-disabled people, and that increasing these rates could contribute to lowering the very high unemployment and underutilisation rates for disabled people and increase their rates of employment. Although the data on disabled learners' achievement in VET is limited, an analysis of that data showed that disabled people under the age of 40 had lower course completion rates than non-disabled people (Ministry of Education, 2021).

The 2021 Te Pūkenga report, Te Rito, was based on 45 focus group sessions held across Aotearoa with campus, online and work-based learners, the staff who support them, and some community and prospective learners. An analysis of the data collected during these engagements yielded eight barriers for disabled learners:

- A lack of disability confidence among some staff
- Difficulty accessing learning support
- Inaccessible communication and information
- Unwillingness on the part of some disabled learners to register for disability support or disclose their impairments
- High levels of anxiety and mental distress among some students
- A lack of funding for impairment-related learning support
- A lack of academic and employment pathways for some disabled students
- Some physical spaces that learners need access to are not accessible.

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[23] This research was supported by a literature review (Beales, 2023).

Various systemic issues affect disabled people's full participation in employment, including societal attitudes, transport, housing, digital inequity and the devaluation of disabled people (Disabled Persons Assembly New Zealand, 2023). These inequitable systems and their complex interactions mean that workers with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty, poor housing, un- and under-employment and social exclusion (Bartram & Cavanaugh, 2019; Van Dalen, 2017). Disabled people, like older people and those who live in social housing, also experience the largest gap in internet access (Grimes & White, 2019), which is a significant barrier to employment, and more broadly to participation in society (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022).

In 2021, Te Ara Ahunga Retirement Commission (n.d.) conducted a nationwide survey exploring financial wellbeing. The results for disabled people, or those with a long-term health condition, showed that they have lower workforce participation and as a consequence, fewer opportunities to build wealth and accumulate assets. Moreover, they have to spend more than they earn, so they are often assessed by financial service providers as a greater credit risk, and therefore need to rely on alternative and potentially more expensive sources of credit. Although they tend to keep a close eye on their finances and have good financial knowledge, they have lower perceptions of their own financial self-efficacy. Overall, the results show comparatively lower levels of financial wellbeing for people with disabilities or long-term health conditions. And because Māori are more likely to experience disability and/or long-term health conditions within any age group, they are also more likely to experience poor financial wellbeing outcomes (Te Ara Ahunga Retirement Commission, n.d.).

Tāngata whaikaha Māori

While many tāngata Whaikaha Māori experience good social and economic outcomes, and most have a good level of overall life satisfaction, they tend to have poorer outcomes than non-disabled Māori with respect to material well-being and quality of life, with the former disparities being the greatest (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). The age-adjusted disability rate for Māori from the 2013 New Zealand Disability Survey is 32 per cent; the main impairments tāngata whaikaha Māori live with are psychological/psychiatric, learning, speech, and intellectual in origin (Hickey & Wilson, 2017). With respect to the latter, Māori have the highest rates of intellectual disability at 1.3 per cent, and Māori with intellectual disability have the lowest life expectancy across ethnic groups at 61.9 per cent for men and 63.3 for women (Beltran-Castillon & McLeod, 2023).

Disability rates for tāngata whaikaha Māori increase with age, rising from 15 per cent for those under 15 to 63 per cent for those over 65; the main causes of impairments for tāngata whaikaha Māori are disease and illness (40 per cent) followed by accidents and injury (28 per cent) (Hickey & Wilson, 2017). In the Māori population, like the total New Zealand population, disabled people are less likely than non-disabled people to be in the labour force, and those who are in the labour force have higher rates of unemployment (Statistics New Zealand, 2015).

Tāngata whaikaha Māori also have lower income, greater likelihood of damp, cold and inadequate housing, higher rates of discrimination and lower rates of self-assessed health compared to other Māori (Statistics New Zealand, 2015). In addition, they are also subject to "disproportionate rates of compulsory treatment under both the Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act 1992 and the Intellectual Disability (Compulsory Care and Rehabilitation) Act 2003" (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022, p. 34). Historically, Māori have been given neither the right nor the resources needed to exercise tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) to address these inequalities (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022).

Perry et al. (2020) explain that the Tiriti o Waitangi principles of partnership, tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), participation, options, active protection and equity have been betrayed by two centuries of colonisation, land confiscation and racism. Māori in the settler colonial state of Aotearoa New Zealand (Terruhn, 2019) experience acts of interpersonal, internalised and institutional racism, which lead to the kind of systemic biases that have a real and substantive impact on health and wellbeing. It is unsurprising, given this context, that Māori have a higher prevalence of disability than other ethnic groups. More tāngata whaikaha Māori (25 per cent) than disabled people of other ethnicities (23 per cent) have insufficient household income to meet their daily needs, while 66 per cent have a personal annual income of less than $30,000 NZD. Participation in culturally popular recreational activities is lower for tāngata whaikaha Māori than other Māori, and they also report issues with insufficient assessments, treatment, and access to culturally acceptable support, equipment, and care funding (Perry et al., 2020).

Tagata sa'ilimalo

Poor outcomes for tagata sa'ilimalo are evident across a range of social indicators, including healthcare access and treatment, employment and housing (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022; Tōfā Mamao, 2023). These outcomes are often compounded when tagata

sa'ilimalo are also members of other marginalised groups. Pacific women, for example, have lower rates of labour force participation and pay. It can also be difficult to understand the scale and nature of the experiences of tagata sa'ilimalo as there is a lack of regularly collected and disaggregated data about these communities. This difficulty is compounded "for Pacific communities whose voices and worldviews are already underrepresented" (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022, p. 37).

Tōfā Mamao, a grass roots collective led entirely by disabled Pacific people, describe tagata sa'ilimalo as a social movement that has emerged over the last 20 years, and as a new vision of disability in Aotearoa (Tōfā Mamao, 2023). They describe a mainstream disability sector built around the needs of individuals in nuclear families, a system less able to accommodate the collectivist needs of people who rely on extended family and community support, and one which misses opportunities to build on the strengths and resources of Pacific communities. Their vision in action is soalaupule, or shared authority, where decisions are made collectively in ways that enable both self-determination and connectedness (Tōfā Mamao Collective, 2024).

Women

Available data suggests that disabled women are marginalised across a range of income and employment-related outcomes (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022). They have lower labour force participation rates than non-disabled women (46 per cent versus 71 per cent) and disabled men (46 per cent versus 54 per cent). Disabled women also have higher unemployment rates than non-disabled women (10 per cent versus 6 per cent) and disabled men and non-disabled men (8 per cent versus 5 per cent). Disabled women are less likely to be in full-time employment than either non-disabled women or disabled men and are more likely than disabled men to earn $30,000 NZD or less per annum (Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022).

Disabled people and employment

During an expert panel discussion held in 2019, Dr Darren Hedley[24] described the employment priorities of people on the autism spectrum in the following way, though his words could apply equally to disabled workers more broadly.

> … employment needs to be meaningful, as well as stable and reliable. It should match the preferences of the individual, and the work environment should be respectful and inclusive. It needs to provide opportunities for inclusion, but also not force the individual to participate in, for example, extracurricular work events if they do not want to. They need to feel included and not separate from the non-autistic workforce (Nicholas, Hedley, Randolph, Raymaker, Robertson & Vincent, 2019 p. 3).

In the same article, Dr Dora Raymaker[25] focused on what good employment outcomes look like for autistic workers. Again, her response could apply equally to other disabled workers, where good employment outcomes include professional growth, work-life balance, financial independence, a sense of community in their workplace, feeling valued, doing meaningful work, and having a disability-friendly work culture (Nicholas et al., 2019). She goes on to mention the positive contributions that employment can make to the overall wellbeing of disabled workers, including better physical and mental health,[26] though she notes that these benefits are dependent on the individual's work-life balance (Nicholas et al., 2019).

Employment is also associated with other benefits, such as a greater sense of autonomy, reduced depression and anxiety symptoms (Giri, Aylott, Giri, Ferguson-Wormley & Evans, 2022);

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24 Research Fellow at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre within the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia.

25 Research Assistant Professor at Portland State University's Regional Research Institute for Human Services in the USA.

26 See also Devine et al., 2022; Lewis & Dijkema, 2022; Lindsay, Cagliostro, Albarico, Mortaji & Karon, 2018; Mark et al., 2019; Shahin, Reitzel, Di Rezze, Ahmed & Anaby, 2020; Wilson & Campain, 2020).

reduced loneliness and social isolation (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022); broader social networks and inclusion (Lindsay et al., 2018) as well as a sense of accomplishment (Scott et al., 2017). The benefits of work can also extend beyond individual disabled workers to their families. Evidence suggests that working outside the home can lead to greater satisfaction with home life for disabled people as well as increased quality of life for their families. Moreover:

> [t]he positive effects of work and family can amplify each other: research has demonstrated that the support of families—in transitioning from school to the workforce, in job searching, in providing practical advice and encouragement—plays an important role in getting people with disabilities into the labour force and affects employment outcomes, including by mediating other employment supports (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022, p. 13).

Employment is considered a fundamental human right; everyone, regardless of their disability status, has the right to work, to freely choose their employment, to work in just conditions and to be protected against unemployment (Lindsay et al., 2018; Mark et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2017). It is also regarded as a rite of passage into adulthood, "without which there is the potential for social exclusion, financial hardship and mental health challenges, as well as lost potential for improved well-being, quality of life, sense of purpose, and social relationships" (Bury, Flower, Zulla, Nicholas & Hedley, 2021, p. 1615).

Employment is critical too for disabled people's economic wellbeing across the lifespan, which in turn has a determinative impact on many other areas of their lives (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022). In recognition of the critical role employment and economic wellbeing play in the lives of workers on the autism spectrum, and, I suggest, for other disabled people, Dr Scott Robertson[27] argues for a consideration of socioeconomic status and the overall quality of life in employment research and in innovating best and promising practices to increase employment opportunities (Nicholas et al., 2019).

The employment of disabled people also confers significant benefits to individual businesses. Accenture, a global professional services company, reported in 2018 that the 45 companies they classified as 'Disability Inclusion Champions' achieved, on average, 28 per cent higher revenue, double the net income and 30 per cent higher economic profit margins over the four-year period

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[27] Dr Scott Robertson describes himself as an autistic adult living in Washington DC. He has led and supported initiatives to improve access to community living and employment for people with disabilities through roles in government and the nonprofit world.

they analysed. In their follow-up study published in 2023, Accenture found that in the previous five years, companies that led on key disability inclusion criteria realised 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income, and twice the economic profit as other participants in Disability:IN's annual benchmark survey (2024). They argue that the business case for hiring disabled people has become even stronger (Accenture, 2023).

In addition to improvements in profitability related to employee performance and increased customer satisfaction, the employment of disabled people benefits companies in the following ways:

- Employees with disability consistently demonstrate punctuality, loyalty and high attendance rates leading to improved customer experience and a competitive advantage for the business.
- Increased ability awareness including challenging stereotypes and misperceptions of disability and recognition of the benefits of hiring people with disability.
- Secondary benefits for employees with disability who report improved quality of life, enhanced self-confidence and a sense of community (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Lindsay et al., 2018).

More broadly, the employment of greater numbers of disabled people would also result in benefits to economies as a whole (Devine et al., 2022; Van Dalen, 2017). As Krassoi Peach explain in their 2016 report, "[t]he low participation of disabled people in the labour market incurs significant economic, fiscal, and social costs that fall on both the disabled individuals affected and to the country as a whole" (p. 5). The cost of the un- and under-employment of disabled people, and/or estimations of the potential gains to the economy have been calculated in several studies. In Australia, for example, closing the gap between the labour market participation and unemployment rates of people with and without disabilities by one-third was calculated to have resulted in an increase in GDP[28] of $43 billion AUD over the decade 2011-2021 (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Deloitte Access Economics, 2011). Even taking into account the costs of supporting disabled people into employment, Krassoi Peach (2016) estimated a potential net gain to the Aotearoa New Zealand economy of over $1.1 billion per year. Similarly, NZIER[29] (2017) calculated a fiscal benefit of $1.45 billion NZD if the labour force participation rates of people with and without disabilities were equalised (Bealing, Krieble & Pambudi, 2017),

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[28] Gross Domestic Product What Is Gross Domestic Product (GDP)? (thebalancemoney.com) (Amadeo, 2022).

[29] New Zealand Institute of Economic Research https://www.nzier.org.nz/

while Malatest International (2016) estimated the opportunity cost to the New Zealand government from the exclusion of disabled people at $11.7 billion.

Despite the fact that employment is a human right, that it confers significant benefits to economies as a whole, as well as economic and other benefits to disabled people themselves, "people with disabilities still do not experience the same access to work opportunities as do their counterparts without disabilities" (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha & Martin Ginis, 2020, p. 135). People with disabilities encounter significant barriers in their search for employment (Van Dalen, 2017). Disabled people also have substantially lower employment rates, and higher unemployment rates than non-disabled people, while disabled workers are less likely to be in full-time employment, have lower relative income levels and a greater possibility of living in poverty (Beatty et al., 2019; Devine et al., 2022; Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2021; Van Dalen, 2017, 2019). Circumstances for disabled people have also been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, as documented in the United Kingdom (UK) by disability advocacy and services organisation [Leonard Cheshire] (n.d.).

Disabled people experience inequitable access to, and participation in, employment here in Aotearoa New Zealand (Beltran-Castillon & McLeod, 2023; Disabled People's Organisations Coalition et al., 2022; Malatest International, 2016), in Australia (Australian Chamber of Commerce & Industry, 2014; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2021; Australian Network on Disability & Social Ventures Australia, 2016; Bartram & Cavanagh, 2019; Devine et al., 2022; Deloitte Access Economics, 2011; Sheppard, 2023; Wilson & Campain, 2020), in Canada (BDO Canada, 2023; Bonaccio et al., 2020; Flick & McManus, 2022; Tompa et al., 2020); the United States (Accenture, 2018, 2023; Cech, 2023; Chordiya, 2022); and in the United Kingdom (Jones, 2023; Holland, 2021; Leonard Cheshire, 2021; Nicholas et al., 2019). As Moore, McDonald and Bartlett (2018) claim, "[t]he global problem of labour market exclusion of people with disability is a major concern across industrialised countries" (p. 328).[30]

Tompa et al. (2020) claim that the relationship between educational attainment and disability severity is critical to an understanding of the disability skills gap in Canada, explaining that people with less severe impairments have educational attainment levels that are similar to those of non-disabled people and correspondingly higher employment rates. In other words, more education results in higher employment rates. As a consequence, researchers argue that education and

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[30] Disabled people's employment rates are 40 per cent lower than the overall average and double the average unemployment rate across OECD countries (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022).

skills development are critical to addressing the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled people (Tompa et al., 2020). They go on to point out that the skills gap will likely become more significant in the future because the low-skill, low-education jobs where disabled people are disproportionately represented are also the jobs at high risk of being impacted and potentially replaced by automation (Tompa et al., 2020). They conclude that "[f]urther research is needed to understand how automation will impact the jobs and sectors where persons with disabilities are often employed and to develop strategies that mitigate any harm and open up new employment possibilities" (Tompa et al., 2020, p. 21).

In addition to acting as a barrier to employment, an individual's disability status can also inhibit their opportunities for success, fair compensation and fulfilment once in the workplace. They are more likely to work part-time and earn less than their non-disabled colleagues, partly because they are under-represented in higher-skilled and higher-paying occupations. However, this pay inequity exists even within the same occupational groups (Holland, 2021). Disabled people experience other employment disadvantages, including fewer hours and lower wages; disproportionate employment in part-time, seasonal, contract-based, and precarious jobs; greater likelihood of holding entry-level positions with fewer opportunities for professional or economic advancement; and higher risk of involuntary job loss and being laid off during recessions (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022). Tompa et al. (2020), when writing about the Canadian context, argue that disabled workers face a pay discrimination gap calculated at 10 per cent after controlling for pay-related characteristics and several other factors. As Chordiya (2022, p. 63) succinctly summarises:

> An individual's disability status often poses a detrimental barrier to their employment and career growth opportunities, exacerbates existing workplace disparities, and has significant social, psychological, and economic consequences. For instance, after controlling for education and impact of disability on performance, research reveals pay disparities among employees with disabilities and their non-disabled coworkers; and that disability status led to biased performance evaluations, lower job security, and negative treatment by management.

A final but critical point in this section is that comparisons between disabled and non-disabled people, while illustrative of a range of employment-related inequities, hide the substantial diversity in labour market participation and employment outcomes related to the nature and severity of disabled people's impairments. As Lewis & Dijkema (2022, p. 18) note, "it is at least

equally as important to examine differences *within* the disability community, such as the nature, severity, and timing of the disability, as well as demographic factors" [emphasis in original]. Research suggests, for example, that people with an impairment acquired in adulthood experience worse labour market outcomes; that people with intellectual disabilities have the lowest labour-market participation compared to those with other disabilities (see also Beltran-Castillon & McLeod, 2023); and that women with disabilities work fewer hours, earn less, and are at a significantly higher risk of poverty than men (Lewis & Dijkema, 2022).

Barriers and enablers of employment for disabled people

Shahin et al. (2020) undertook a review of 31 studies, carried out across a range of countries including New Zealand, and published between 1995 and 2018. Their purpose was to investigate barriers to, and enablers of, workplace participation for transition-aged young adults aged 18-35 with brain-based disabilities.[31] The framework they use to categorise these barriers and enablers is called the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) Environmental Domains*; I have used these categories to organise the section that follows. It is important to keep in mind, however, that like the medical, social and human rights models described earlier, the ICF was developed in a Western cultural context and may not account for Māori worldviews that are collective rather than individualistic (Hickey & Wilson, 2017).

Products and technology/natural environment and human-made changes to environment

In the first category, which focuses on the built and natural environments and on technology, Shahin et al. (2020) identified a number of barriers: the lack of physical accessibility and assistive technology, inflexible and unreliable public transport and in some cases inadequate lighting and temperature in work settings. The perceived cost of providing accommodations and adapting the physical environment were identified as barriers to acquiring a job, while accommodations to meet an employee's needs both enhanced performance and supported engagement in the workplace. Similarly, following the principles of Universal Design (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2024) is an enabler, not only for disabled people but for all workers (Nicholas et al., 2019). The [seven principles of Universal Design](#) provide a useful guide for employers

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[31] Brain-based disabilities refer to any neurologically based congenital or acquired conditions, as well as neurologically chronic conditions such as cerebral palsy, brain- and spinal-related injuries, and including sensory disorders (Shahin et al., 2020).

developing policy, buildings, services or anything else impacting the accessibility of the workplace for disabled people (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2024). They are:

1. Equitable Use: The design is useful and marketable to persons with diverse abilities.
2. Flexibility in Use: The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
3. Simple and Intuitive Use: Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.
4. Perceptible Information: The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
5. Tolerance for Error: The design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
6. Low Physical Effort: The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
7. Size and Space for Approach and Use: Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility (Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, 2024).

Working from home and the use of assistive technology such as dual monitors and computerised phones and alarms were also identified as enablers of work satisfaction and work maintenance for disabled workers (Shahin et al., 2020).

Access to adequate transportation, public or private, was a significant enabler of paid employment amongst young adults with mobility, hearing, vision, communication and/or cognitive impairments. In particular, flexible and timely transportation was found to support employment of those with physical disabilities. Geographical location was also considered important, with young disabled workers living in urban areas more likely to find a job than people living rurally. Thinking about those rural areas, technology could be better utilised to provide the kinds of services that disabled people need in order to find and access employment, and to thrive in workplaces (Nicholas et al., 2019).

Lighting and temperature also impacted on some employees' ability to do their job; the brightness of the work environment, for example, often caused headaches or impeded computer work because of the reflection of light on desktops for employees with traumatic brain injury (Shahin et al., 2020).

Employers can unintentionally impose technological barriers on disabled jobseekers during the application process (Tompa et al., 2020). For example, people with cognitive disabilities can be

excluded from applying for jobs where the application process occurs entirely online. Similarly, for those who require additional time to complete an application, the timing out mechanism in online application tools can also present a barrier. Moreover, job application websites can often be inaccessible to people with visual impairments who use a screen reader (Tompa et al., 2020).

Harnessing the opportunities represented by technological (and social) change is also considered a potential enabler of employment for disabled people (Van Dalen, 2017). This might include the capacity of new technologies to support more inclusive and productive workforces through, for example, the introduction of assistive technologies, or via improvements in the accessibility of workplaces and activities (Bailey, Carnemolla, Loosemore, Darcy & Sankaran, 2022).

Support and relationships

Family members, especially parents, played an important role in finding and keeping employment for younger disabled people, although high parental involvement was not always perceived as an enabler (Shahin et al., 2020). While young adults' lack of social support, including the perception of low support from parents, were the main barriers for some disabled people in the support and relationships category, high parental support, or overprotective parents, presented even greater barriers to employment. Research also suggests that disabled people and their family and carers' limited aspirations of post-secondary education and employment can function as barriers to success (Thies, Warr, Mallett & Brown, 2021; Wilson & Campain, 2020). In the same way that the social networks around the person with disabilities can shut down possibilities through their low expectations, "[f]amilies can also act to foster higher expectations, broaden horizons and connect into employment and other opportunities" (Wilson & Campain, 2020, p. 17). Similarly, disabled young people's aspirations are nurtured and grown when they see other disabled people succeeding at work; in other words, role models matter (Wilson & Campain, 2020).

For people with autism and/or intellectual disabilities, barriers in this category also included a lack of parental support, time, awareness and knowledge of abilities, as well as parental fatigue and an unwillingness to assist with job searches. Family involvement, in contrast, helped disabled young people to find and maintain employment by providing support at the workplace, and in some cases, assisting with transportation (Shahin et al., 2020). In addition, parents with high work-related expectations, who advocated supported employment and provided emotional support, increased the likelihood of being employed and meeting the demands of the job on a daily basis amongst those with learning and other disabilities (Shahin et al., 2020).

Social support from peers and co-workers was also identified as a main enabler of employment (Shahin et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2019). Dr Darren Hedley (in Nicholas et al., 2019) noted that one of the most important enablers for autistic workers is having someone who they (or their coworkers) can approach to resolve any issues that arise. He goes on to explain that:

> If work problems are related to soft skills, most seem to be resolved by having a person who understands autism, serving as a mediator between the autistic individual and wherever the problem is occurring in the workplace. Champions and advocates in the workplace are important to success (p. 6).

Engagement in work was also facilitated in inclusive workplaces where interaction between workers is encouraged, for example by prompting co-workers and managers to invite employees to socialise during breaks, lunches and while working. Joining in work-related social activities such as staff functions, eating lunch with workmates and developing relationships outside the workplace also increased the likelihood that employees with intellectual disabilities would remain in their job (Shahin et al., 2020). Certain kinds of management styles were also identified as enablers of employment for disabled people, for example managers who built relationships and created a strong sense of teamwork, those who had direct contact with their employees; and those who treated disabled employees equally, valuing their skills and opinions (Shahin et al., 2020).

More specifically, as Dr Jena Randolf (in Nicholas et al., 2019) argues, employer readiness is critical. An essential part of this readiness is understanding how they might be more flexible, not only in the interview and selection processes, but also in considering job modifications. They could, for example, think about carving positions that feed into individual strengths; consider modifying the type and amount of work; and better use peer mentors and mentorship programs. Her fellow panel member Dr Jonathan Vincent suggests that dialogue is the key to improving employment outcomes. He explains that an autistic colleague and former company owner believes that it comes down to having a conversation at industry or sector levels, in addition to one at the level of individual workplaces. An important component of improving outcomes is changing employers' and industry professionals' perceptions, he argues, and this is best achieved from the inside. He concludes that:

> … the best way that this will happen is for people within companies who have seen the success of autistic people, to move beyond and advance this notion not as merely socially good but rather as good for companies (pp. 9-10).

Attitudes

The attitudes of employers and co-workers towards disabled workers are perceived mainly as a barrier to fulfilling employment for disabled people (Shahin et al., 2020). In fact, the Australian Network on Disability and Social Ventures Australia (2016) claim that "the worst obstacle that people with disability face in getting employment is employer ignorance" (p. 6). Young adults with a disability often experience prejudice and stigma (BDO Canada, 2023; Tompa et al., 2020) from their employers and co-workers in the workplace, while many employers incorrectly believe that employing a disabled person will incur additional cost and risk to their business (Australian Network on Disability & Social Ventures Australia, 2016; Shahin et al., 2020; Van Dalen, 2017). In other words, as Shahin et al. (2020) conclude, "this prejudice created obstacles in young adults' abilities to acquire and enter the labor market or to advance in their careers" (p. 24).

Common stereotypes about the employment of disabled people include that they are unable to work, that they require expensive accommodations and that they are unwilling to be active members of teams and organisations (Shahin et al., 2020). According to autistic job seekers, "people are expecting a Rain Man or a computer genius or a hacker, and there is not enough awareness of what autism actually is" (Nicholas et al. 2019, p. 5). As Bartram and Cavanagh (2019, p. 346) state in their editorial:

> In our view, we are simply not equipping contemporary managers with the knowledge, skills and abilities and more importantly the confidence to engage in disability employment and effective management. As part of the education of current managers and the next generation of managers it is vitally important that we break down the misconceptions of employing workers with disability and the often-misguided fears of managers about the potential for 'problems' associated with disability employment.

According to Tompa et al. (2020), more education and support on disability related matters are required to reduce a range of unnecessary barriers to employment. This process of employer and manager upskilling is often called developing 'disability confidence'; disability confident employers are able to create inclusive and accessible workplaces for their employees and their customers or clients. The process of developing disability confidence, they explain, usually occurs in four distinct phases, where the first is characterised by discomfort, stigmatisation and a lack of understanding, all of which have a damaging impact on employer perceptions and practices. Stage two occurs when employers move beyond their comfort zone and do training

that raises their awareness of disability issues. With this as a foundation, employers in the third stage can broaden their perspectives to focus on individual abilities rather than limited stereotypes, and in the fourth, "disability confident employers focus on inclusion and accessibility by developing supportive work cultures and advocating for social change within and beyond their organisation" (Tompa et al., 2020, p. 18).

Writing about people with intellectual disabilities, Wilson and Campain (2020) argue that their poor employment outcomes are self-reinforcing. For example,

> Low expectations about the capacity of people with intellectual disability as workers, held by family members, employers, other stakeholders (such as teachers and careers advisors) and sometimes by people with disability themselves, lead to a lack of engagement with work as a life option, which in turn reinforces low expectations (p. 8).

They go on to explain that this negative cycle can be broken; that when people with intellectual disability get the opportunity to work, evidence of their capacity for employment, and the employer's capacity to accommodate them, lifts everyone's expectations. When expectations about work are high from the beginning, opportunities for work experience and work increase. Together, raised expectations and access to work experience dramatically improves employment outcomes (Wilson & Campain, 2020).

Myth and stereotype busting, as well as the sharing of evidence-based knowledge about autism (or indeed other disabilities), what it is like to be autistic/disabled, and the contributions disabled people can and do make to society are all critical. Autism awareness specifically, and disability awareness more broadly, are key enablers of the successful integration of disabled people into the workforce. The colleagues of employees with autism report benefits from greater knowledge of it, including understanding why certain behaviours or challenges may arise, and how these might be related to autistic traits (Nicholas et al., 2019).

Sheppard's (2023) report published in Australia by JobAccess is a good example of myth busting. She lists five myths and the evidence that refutes these, the first of which is that employing disabled people is expensive. Research shows, she argues, that accommodating disabled employees costs no more than supporting non-disabled workers. The second myth is that employees with disability have a high turnover rate, an assertion that is disproved by research that shows that disabled employees remain with an employer an average of four months longer than non-disabled workers. Myth three is that disabled workers will not fit in, which she counters

by quoting the findings of a recent Australian study which identified the organisational benefits of having disabled workers on staff including the value of new creative skills, the increase in disability awareness, and a conscious, positive change in overall workplace inclusion. The fourth myth is that the productivity of disabled workers is lower, but Sheppard's counterargument, supported by nine studies, is that productivity is actually a benefit of hiring disabled people. The last myth is that disabled workers present a higher risk of injury, which she counters by noting that four studies have found evidence that the presence of disabled workers in fact improves workplace safety (Sheppard, 2023).[32]

Disabled people also commonly get hired for less skilled jobs because their employers do not believe in their abilities (Bonnaccio et al., 2019; Shahin et al., 2020). In addition, research in Aotearoa New Zealand describes an apparent hierarchy of disability where the nature of the impairment has an impact on employer attitudes towards the employment of disabled people (Woodley, Metzger & Dylan, 2012).[33] The authors of the same paper suggest that perceptions about how staff, customers and clients could react may be giving employers social license not to hire disabled people. They identify this as an area for further research, noting that:

> Despite New Zealand employers having a belief that disabled people deserve a fair go, and despite the largely positive experiences of those who have employed disabled people, it appears that addressing issues such as the perceived mismatch between an ideal employee and disabled people, and perceptions of others' discomfort may need to be further explored to see whether they offer promise in helping to redress the underemployment of disabled people. (Woodley et al., 2012, p. 6).

This discrepancy between the attitudes and behaviour of employers is the focus of Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen's (2021) research. The literature on attitudes, they explain, concludes that employers express generally positive attitudes towards the recruitment of disabled people, i.e., they consider disabled employees a valuable and productive part of the workforce. In contrast, studies on employer behaviour generally find that jobseekers with disabilities are much

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[32] This paper was informed by a scoping review of the last decade and a half of peer-reviewed literature and statistics on the topic of the costs and benefits of disability employment. I have not been able to find a copy of the review online; it may not have been published.

[33] Flick and McManus (2022) also identify a hierarchy of disability in their report on the lesson learned by employers of disabled people in Canada.

less likely to be invited to job interviews compared with non-disabled job applicants. The penalty for the disclosure of a disability depends, they explain, on the national context, disability type and the nature of the job. Bredgaard and Salado-Rasmussen (2021) explore this mismatch by examining employer attitudes and behaviour using the same research method, a representative survey of public and private sector employers in Denmark. They find that while most (75 per cent) of the employers in their study agreed that they had a social obligation to recruit disabled people, only 23 per cent currently or previously employed people with mobility impairments. The same variables, they suggest, mediate both attitudes and behaviour: company size, job function availability, whether the employer knows disabled people, and whether they have information about public programmes and whether the company has a Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy[34] (Bredgaard & Salado-Rasmussen, 2021).

Employer attitudes, knowledge, capacity and management practices were identified as the top barriers to employment for people with developmental disabilities[35] in Canada by a group of diverse stakeholders that included people with developmental disabilities and their families/caregivers, employers, and vocational training professionals (Khayatzadeh-Mahani, Wittevrongel, Nicholas & Zwicker, 2020). The stakeholders noted that many employers have a limited understanding of developmental disabilities, and do not know how to support a person with those disabilities in the workplace. This can in turn lead to poor hiring and management practices such as limited flexibility in recruiting processes and poor adaptation of tasks and other work-related activities. The same stakeholders also identified key policy solutions, the most commonly prioritised being the promotion of employer training and knowledge (Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2020).

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[34] Corporate Social Responsibility is a management concept that involves companies integrating social and environmental concerns into their business operations (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2023).

[35] Developmental disabilities are conditions that are present at birth and impact intellectual and physical abilities, language, and behaviour. They are usually identified in childhood and affect a person throughout their lives; examples include attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, learning disabilities, and cerebral palsy (Wisner, 2023).

Services, systems and policies

Shahin et al. (2020) classify barriers and enablers in this category according to whether they are based within organisations or external to them. Internal barriers included complex procedures to obtain and implement accommodations; inflexible allocation of resources; lengthy, bureaucratic processes (BDO Canada, 2023); and organisations' lack of understanding of their own policies and processes and how to implement these. On their own or cumulatively, these barriers impeded disabled people's successful integration, engagement and retention. These internal barriers are evident in organisations where accommodations are based on employer recognition or willingness to provide services, or in those where disabled workers' accommodations are determined using a medically oriented approach that focuses on employees' diagnoses rather than their needs in the workplace. The impacts of these latter barriers are accentuated where there is limited funding to support employer and co-worker awareness about disability, and inadequate recognition of particular kinds of certificates or diplomas (Shahin et al., 2020).

Internal organisational enablers such as flexible work settings facilitated the participation of disabled workers, especially in relation to adjusting schedules and/or job demands to their specific abilities (Nicholas et al., 2019; Shahin et al., 2020). Organisations that provide adequate accommodations in a timely way, such as working from home or the provision of more time, contributed to the employment of disabled employees. Job sustainability for this group of workers was enabled by organisations that supported individuals in both work and non-work areas, and those that provided guidance on company policies, protocols and culture. Supervision and appropriate training were also perceived as enablers, as were the provision of ongoing support, together with clear job descriptions and expectations. Organisations that provided disability awareness and training for staff also increased the prospect of creating a safe and engaging work environment for disabled workers (Shahin et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the absence of disability as an identified group in an organisation's diversity strategy, as well as inadequate knowledge and training about anti-discrimination legislation and reasonable accommodations, are significant barriers to the recruitment of people with disability. Although a manager may believe that recruiting a person with disability offers benefits to the organisation, in the absence of disability-inclusive recruitment practices, the actual recruitment of disabled people may not occur (Moore et al., 2018). Moore et al. (2018) go on to summarise the most critical barriers to organisations legitimising disability employment practices are "the lack of

managerial support for recruiting people with disability, the lack of disability awareness training, and [a lack of] experience of working with people with different types of disabilities" (p.329).

Turning now to external barriers and enablers, disabled employees expressed the need for more services both to find and to keep employment, including for example assistance with job applications and job search (Shahin et al., 2020). A scarcity of accessible employment and professional support negatively impacted disabled workers' ability to enter and stay in the workforce, while access to disability employment and other services that provided training to employers, and supported the employee on the job facilitated transitions into the workforce. Thinking more broadly, Dr Hedley argues that we should be thinking about providing career pathways for people with autism, as well as jobs (Nicholas et al., 2019). Similarly, he also argues that a paradigm shift is required, one that turns the job search process on its head by identifying an individual's strengths and abilities, as well as the contribution they might make to an organisation or work environment, rather than the other way around (Nicholas et al., 2019).

Other contextual factors

Factors that did not fit into any one of the ICF categories outlined above also functioned as barriers and/or enablers to the recruitment and retention of disabled workers. These include the disabled worker's personal circumstances such as financial advantages, educational opportunities, and opportunities to contribute to the community in activities such as volunteering, all of which improved employment outcomes (Shahin et al., 2020). Higher levels of education led to a broader range of qualified jobs with a higher salary, while young people who were supported by disability services, and those who participated in internship programs offered through their high school and/or post-secondary schools were also found to have better employment opportunities. In contrast, research shows that a lack of previous work experience[36] and lower levels of education resulted in fewer employment opportunities (Shahin et al., 2020).

An additional and significant barrier, and one that straddles several of the ICF categories above, might be described as a particular kind of organisational culture, one in which workers feel pressured to mask their disabilities or other marginalised identities. Returning to the expert panel

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[36] Black et al. (2020) and Wilson and Campain (2020) report the inverse of this negative association, noting that providing early work experience is an enabler of good employment outcomes for people with autism.

discussion mentioned earlier, Dr Dora Raymaker (Nicholas et al., 2019, p. 6) describes it this way:

> A huge barrier to success in our studies consisted of pressures to mask autism or other marginalized identities—having to hide who you are, not being able to get accommodations, and working in an environment where you did not feel comfortable disclosing or asking for accommodations. The combined strain of that led to a lot of bad situations. In contrast, job cultures that accommodated and led autistic people to be themselves, including safe disclosure, as well as just being able to act autistic at work, were huge facilitators of success.

She goes on to describe several related and significant barriers to disabled people's success in employment - a history of failure in getting and keeping jobs, as well as abuse, bullying and trauma. Dr Dora Raymaker explains further that early trauma can manifest in the workplace as an expectation of poor treatment from employers and managers, a fear of talking to colleagues, and a reluctance to say 'no' to anyone for fear that you may get hurt or lose your job, even in circumstances where you cannot do what is being asked of you. These kinds of traumas, she claims, build up over time to the point that it is a significant impediment to disabled people's successful integration into the workforce. Early successes, she concludes, are great enablers of future positive outcomes (Nicholas et al., 2019).

Fear of disclosure is also a barrier, both to finding and keeping a job (Van Dalen, 2017). Flick and McManus (2022), writing about the Canadian context, claim that an employer's attitude towards disclosure can "make or break an employee's ability to fully participate in their workplace" (p. 8). They go on to list a number of reasons for non-disclosure, which include a lack of clarity on when or how disclosures can be made; distrust, fear or uncertainty about reactions; or the workplace culture is not welcoming to disability or disclosure. Tackling these issues requires, they argue, an understanding of why employees do or do not disclose; ensuring that there is consistent support available across the employment cycle and between departments; tackling myths and providing accommodations proactively; and keeping up to date with digital tools and the changing nature of work (Flick & McManus, 2022).

Dr Jonathan Vincent,[37] also speaking as part of the expert panel, suggests that there is a lack of trust in employers among autistic students and graduates, which is related to a fear of how

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[37] From the School of Education at York St John University in the United Kingdom.

employers or managers will react to disclosure. "Will they respond positively or put the application to one side? Will they perhaps offer an interview but if so, it feels like it is out of sympathy or charity?" (Nicholas et al., 2019, p. 7). Disclosure is not only about getting the right support and accommodations, but also about being able to be yourself, in other words and using the language above, "[d]isclosure is also about being able to take off the mask. Even if you do not need accommodations, being able to fully be yourself and feel accepted as yourself …" (Nicholas et al., 2019, p. 10).

Dr Robertson argues that supporting disclosure is a critical enabler of better employment outcomes for autistic people:

> Autistic employees and job seekers need to be met where we are when ensuring that we can disclose in ways that address our concerns. Sometimes that may mean selective disclosure. Some autistic people may not necessarily always want to discuss their autism. Others may want to disclose to their supervisors, but not tell coworkers. I find it critical to support flexibility for disclosure. Selective disclosure may mean that autistic workers can state, for instance, "Fluorescent lights bother me," or, "I just need a quieter space." Supporting disclosure ensures that autistic employees can access needed workplace accommodations, adjustments, and supports (Nicholas et al., 2019, p. 9).

The job interview itself is identified as a barrier for autistic jobseekers by expert panel member Dr Darren Hedley. This is particularly the case, he contends, "when autistic individuals are competing against non-autistic individuals in an interview that is reliant on making a good first impression and social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee" (Nicholas et al., 2019, p. 5).

Barriers and enablers of employment for disabled people in small and medium-sized enterprises

Barriers and enablers specific to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)[38] were explored in the Australian context in a report commissioned by Small Business Australia (Council of Small

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[38] Defined as business owners who employ between one and 49 staff (Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, 89 Degrees East, & Truth-Serum, 2018).

Business Organisations Australia, 89 Degrees East & Truth-Serum, 2018). They begin by noting that the findings of their primary research (a survey with 519 participants and focus groups with 74 small and medium business owners) reinforce existing scholarship in identifying SME business owners as time poor, overloaded with internal and external expectations, and lacking in formal HR[39] resources and processes. "Any initiatives that add further administrative or supervisory functions", they argue, "are unlikely to attract any interest, no matter how important" (Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, 89 Degrees East & Truth-Serum, 2018, p. 3).

Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, 89 Degrees East, & Truth-Serum (2018) listed the following barriers that impede the recruitment of disabled workers:

- Concerns about legal and ethical risks, particularly if the arrangement does not work out.
- The time and complexities involved in applying for funding for workplace modifications or wage subsidies.
- Many employers are unsure how to deal with different impairments because of a limited understanding of disability and the varied supports required.
- The word 'disability' is a label with negative connotations – terms like 'diversity' or 'inclusion' are more appealing, clearer and associated with positive outcomes.
- A lack of easily accessible information and advice about how to hire a disabled worker.
- Concerns over the cost and time involved with workplace accommodations (p. 4).

The kinds of initiatives that small business owners and managers believe would encourage others to consider employing a disabled worker included:

- Ongoing specialist employee and employer support for SMEs throughout recruitment and employment processes, potentially through industry associations or other trusted sources.
- Better information and advice around how to hire a person with disability and job match skills and experience, for example, a simple classification system for employers on different impairments and the potential modifications or additional supports that might be required to support them at work.
- Streamline the application and approval process for financial assistance from government for workplace adjustments and wage assistance.

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[39] Human Resources.

- Provide clearer information and advice around an SME's legal responsibilities and obligations related to employing a person with a disability. Ideally the information should be industry- and workplace-specific.

- Produce more case studies, videos and examples of other small business experiences when hiring a person with a disability. It's motivating for SMEs to see how others are making it work in their business/industry, which creates a positive 'can-do' attitude (Council of Small Business Organisations Australia, 89 Degrees East, & Truth-Serum, 2018, p. 5).

Disabled workers in Waihanga Ara Rau and Hanga-Aro-Rau Industries

In this section, I provide an overview of current scholarship on disabled people's employment in Waihanga Ara Rau and Hanga-Aro-Rau industries. Although I did a range of searches using all the industry components of each WDC – construction, infrastructure, manufacturing, engineering and logistics – the results were variable within Aotearoa and internationally. Construction and engineering were the most developed and manufacturing the least, while resources on disabled workers in infrastructure and logistics as stand-alone categories were negligible and do not feature in the sections that follow.

Construction and Infrastructure

Although the construction sector is the largest employer in the world and faces significant skills shortages globally, it has struggled to increase the diversity of its workforce, including raising the number and proportion of disabled employees (Bailey et al., 2022). Bailey et al. (2022, p.1/15) describe disability employment research in the construction industry as "nascent, with significant knowledge gaps." These include two significant areas: barriers to employment based on the lived experiences of people with disability, and methodological gaps including the need for more construction research design to include people with disability as research participants as well as research investigators. The primary research component of the Disabled People, Tāngata Whaikaha Māori and Tagata Sa'ilimalo Project will in some measure address both these shortfalls.

Disclosure was also identified as an area requiring further research, from the points of view of both disabled people and construction employers (Bailey et al., 2022). As noted in the section above on barriers and enablers, research shows that employees can be reluctant to disclose disability because of the associated stigma and that employers can be uncomfortable asking about an applicant's disability in the employment process making it hard to assess whether the applicant will be able to do the job (Bailey et al., 2022). One of the studies presented in their review (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 8/15) involved an analysis of UK Labour Force Survey Data in order

to establish the proportion of disabled people (and other marginalised groups) working in the British construction sector. It was not possible to do this because of the low levels of disability disclosure in the sector and no information either on workers who chose not to disclose.

Relatively less attention is likewise paid to the theme of 'relationship building' in the construction disability scholarship (Bailey et al., 2022). One example of this area of scholarship is a case study about a project-based intermediary between the construction company on the one hand and the organisations that specialise in providing employment support for disabled people on the other. The intermediary provided:

> important practical training, information and support to both job seekers and employers in the construction supply chain about the employment of marginalized groups like people with a disability. Collaboration between construction contractors and disability employment service providers was key to this support, reducing complexity and perceived risks for employers previously reluctant to employ people with disability (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 9/15).

There has similarly been limited sector-specific research on culture in the construction sector, organisational structures or other factors such as job design, workforce planning, or the hiring process. Each of these might be "exclusionary, create work disincentives and contribute to current low levels of employment of people with disability" (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 10).

Bailey et al.'s (2022) scoping review emphasises the significant proportion of studies on reasonable accommodations. This body of work focused variously on the opportunities to support more inclusive and productive workplaces presented by new technologies; the nature and scope of adaption and accommodation types to support disabled labourers on site; the role of accommodations in retaining workers; and the greater likelihood of UK contractors making required adjustments to workplaces for employees who acquire a disability while they are working onsite.

Overall, Bailey et al. (2022) conclude that while there is some research in construction that identifies barriers to employment for disabled people, and describes the stigma attached to disabled identities, there are fewer studies on the kinds of enablers that can overcome these entrenched barriers. The barriers described in these articles include physical obstacles and inaccessible workplace settings; the traditionally male and able-bodied workforce of self-employed contractors; inflexible employment conditions; and the practice of recruiting tradesmen

from contractors' established, narrow social networks (University of Technology Sydney, 2023). Attitudinal barriers include "the perceptions, assumptions, attitudes or beliefs that people with disability cannot work long hours, increase the cost of supervision and have health needs that will impact on productivity and absenteeism" (Bailey et al., 2022, p.7/15), many of which are unfounded, as noted earlier in this review.

The review authors conclude by arguing:

> If the sector hopes to innovate in finding new employment pathways into construction for people with disability, it is critical that research investigates the perspectives of people with disability currently employed in the sector, and the large numbers of people who have been disabled as a result of working in the sector and who are working or no longer able to work in the sector. Understanding how people with disability perceive the sector from the inside will help build successful recruitment strategies for people from the outside (Bailey et al., 2022, p. 12/15).

The 'large numbers' of people disabled through their work in the construction sector, and the differential treatment received by employees disabled onsite versus those incapacitated elsewhere as described earlier in this section, were particular to the construction sector (Bailey et al., 2022). It is worth noting this sector-specific characteristic, I think, and accounting for it in the development of primary research with any employers, business associations and disabled people from this sector.

As a follow-up to the scoping review undertaken by Bailey et al., Loosemore, Sankaran and Carnemolla (cited in University of Technology Sydney, 2023) undertook a data collection exercise in which post-graduate Project Management students roleplayed various construction industry stakeholders. As many of the students were also industry practitioners, this provided the research team with a clearer understanding of industry perceptions of disability. Together, the two projects provided a list of both the most common barriers, but also the enablers of the employment of disabled people in the construction industry. Barriers included: stigma and discrimination, concerns about the equality and fairness of workplaces and systems, non-disclosure of disability, and a general lack of awareness and understanding of disability, which leads many employers to underestimate the different ways that disabled people can contribute to the workforce (University of Technology Sydney, 2023).

Enablers, on the other hand, include:

> …creating early intervention, education and training frameworks aimed at changing attitudes towards disability; developing targeted marketing campaigns for specific employers; identifying alternative or different work options for people with disability; and adapting government programs, systems and legislation to overcome existing barriers (University of Technology Sydney, 2023)

Manufacturing

Resources on the employment of disabled people in the manufacturing sector are few and far between. The material I did find falls into two categories, web-based and focused on good practice examples (Wilson, 2023), or academic articles centred on the development of assistance systems to increase the inclusion of disabled people into manufacturing systems. The latter exist within the context of the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0,[40] where the worker is at the centre of the system as an indispensable resource (Mark et al., 2019; Mark, Rauch & Matt, 2021). Even in this core subset of manufacturing scholarship, the disability focus is uncommon. As the authors explain (Mark et al., 2019, p.1/15), "[t]he inclusion of employees with disabilities in production is an issue that has rarely been addressed by scientists from the manufacturing sector."

Worker assistance systems are defined in this body of scholarship as "technical systems that support the worker during manufacturing or assembly work tasks without replacing [them], without overruling [them] and without posing any danger to the worker" (Mark et al., 2021, p. 228). Such systems enhance people's physical, sensory, and cognitive capabilities, but can also play a big role in promoting inclusion in the workplace for people with disabilities. They can be subdivided into sensory, physical and cognitive assistance systems. Sensory assistance systems are already being implemented in many factories and involve supporting workers to gather, process and filter information about their environment. Examples include pictographs which can support those with reading difficulties and warning lights or audible signals as indicators of hazards for workers with visual or auditory impairments. Physical assistance systems support physical functions such as the ability to assemble, for example, and help too with precision,

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[40] Industry 4.0 describes the growing trend towards automation and data exchange in technology and processes (TWI Ltd, 2024).

dexterity, speed and strength. Examples include exoskeletons, either whole or in part, such as upper extremities or hands, and collaborative robots that can provide lifting support or hold parts while an operator is executing specific tasks. Cognitive assistance systems can decrease the mental workload of operators by, for example, providing specific assembly instructions for every change in the product line so that workers do not have to memorise them.

Turning now to good practice, Leslie Wilson, writing in Industry Week (2023), argues that the skilled labour shortage in the United States creates challenges for employers, but also a unique opportunity to drive workplace inclusion. She goes on to quote the Accenture (2018, 2023) research which found that companies championing disability inclusion have higher profitability and shareholder returns. Amongst the case studies presented in their article is one for Jabil,[41] a global manufacturing company with more than a quarter of a million employees spread across 30 countries. Amongst their good practices, Wilson lists hosting workshops to raise awareness of specific disabilities, teaching employees sign language at several sites to create opportunities for inclusion, and cultivating a pipeline of neurodiverse talent by partnering with organisations that can help them align job descriptions to the skills candidates already have (Wilson, 2023).

Northrup Grumman, a global aerospace and defence technology company (2024a), is the second good practice example provided. Their good practices include a Global Supplier Diversity Program where Small Business Liaison Officers advocate for small businesses from minoritised communities (Northrup Grumman, 2024b); and a neurodiverse internship programme (Mroz, 2024) designed to match neurodiverse candidates with an employee mentor for support.

Engineering

For some time now, engineering education scholars and social scientists have reported on the marginalisation of women and people of colour in science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM), and more recently on the similarly exclusionary treatment of sexual and gender minorities (Cech, 2023). However, comparatively little is known about the experiences of disabled engineering students and disabled engineers, though what is understood from pioneering early research is that "engineers with disabilities face a variety of constraints, burdens, stereotypes, and discriminatory treatment in the profession" (Cech, 2023, p. 463). In addition, science and technology studies (STS) scholars claim that STEM broadly, and engineering specifically, may be especially harsh for disabled people. In her recently published article, Cech (2023) sets out to

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[41] Jabil offers solu-ons across Hanga-Aro-Rau industries, in engineering, manufacturing and supply chain solu-ons.

test her hypothesis that engineers with physical impairments and chronic and mental illness are more likely to experience exclusion and a devaluation of their professional expertise than their non-disabled peers and, partly as a consequence of this, have lower intentions of staying in engineering.

Using survey data from 1729 students enrolled in eight United States engineering programs[42] and 8321 US-employed engineers,[43] Cech compares the experiences of engineering students and professionals with disabilities to non-disabled engineering students and professionals in the same programmes and types of work. She concludes from her analysis that:

> … students with physical disabilities and mental illness, and professionals with physical disabilities and chronic and mental illness, encountered persistently more negative treatment by their peers than engineering students and professionals without these forms of disability. Persistence intentions were lower on average among engineering students and professionals with disabilities compared to their peers, and this was partly accounted for by their greater exposure to social exclusion and professional devaluation in their classrooms and workplaces (Cech, 2023, p. 479).

Lezotte, Hartman, Farrell & Forin (2020) reported similar findings in their study with disabled engineering students at a college in the United States. The students with disability were less likely to feel part of the engineering community or feel welcome in the college of engineering, a result that aligns with the findings of other studies with disabled students in STEM fields. They also faced more academic challenges than their non-disabled peers and found it more difficult too to get help from classroom faculty or advisors (Lezotte et al., 2020).

Cech (2023) makes three additional points that are relevant to her findings on disabled engineering students and professionals, and to the kaupapa of this review. The first of these is that disabled people have routinely been seen in engineering as a population that engineers should help or fix through the design of products or processes, rather than as a group to be afforded full and equal participation in the engineering enterprise. The second point is that social exclusion has important implications for career development; engineering students and professionals who are less socially integrated with their classmates and colleagues are more likely to miss out on informal learning and collaboration opportunities. As Cech explains, "social

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[42] American Society for Engineering Education Diversity and Inclusion Survey (Cech, 2023).

[43] Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Inclusion Study Survey (Cech, 2023).

inclusion is not just a matter of having friends in class or at work; it is a pipeline of career skills and opportunities as well" (2023, p. 467).

The last point focuses on the ways in which we might interpret the findings of her research, and is so salient to the kaupapa of the disability project at Hanga-Aro-Rau and Waihanga Ara Rau that I have included it here in full:

> In making sense of these findings, it is imperative that we do not interpret them … as the outcome of "personal tragedies." The social and material disadvantages that engineers with disabilities may experience within classrooms and workplaces are the product of socially constructed structural and cultural environments that deem certain physical, psychological, and intellectual characteristics as "normal" and take such characteristics as the point of reference when arranging curricula, classrooms, workplaces, labs, and communication infrastructures. Ableism is a characteristic of engineering education programs and the engineering profession the same way engineering is embedded with sexism, racism, and heteronormativity. As with other axes of sociodemographic inequality, the solution is not to meet those disadvantaged by the culture and structure of engineering with expectations for adaptation or change, but rather to address the biased structures and cultures themselves (Cech, 2023, p. 483).

Cech also outlines what she believes can be done to address these inequities (Cech, 2023). A bare minimum, she explains, is that accommodations should be easy to access and de-stigmatised, and that students and workers should be reminded regularly of how and where they can be accessed. Disability should be included as a stand-alone category in organisations' diversity, equity and inclusion policies and strategies. Employers should provide structured opportunities such as staff networks and/or reference groups for disabled employees "to build community and allyship and to anchor collective fronts for articulating grievances and demanding change" (Cech, 2023, p. 484). Disabled engineers should not be 'designed for' but instead be 'designers with.' Lastly, Chouinard (1997, cited in Cech, 2023) argues that the issue of ableism in engineering classrooms and workplaces should be addressed. They explain ableism as:

> … the cultural and institutional valuation of specific versions of bodies and minds - ones perceived as free from "faults" - which marginalizes mental, emotional, physical, or ambulatory differences and frames such differences as deviant. Ableism incudes the practices, structures, and social relations that "presume able bodiedness, and by doing so, construct [people with disabilities] as marginalized 'others' (p. 484).

The Diversity Agenda (2024) is a joint initiative from Engineering New Zealand (2024) the New Zealand Institute of Architects (n.d.) and ACE New Zealand (n.d.) a non-profit organisation for consulting and engineering Aotearoa. Launched in 2018, it has over 160 members working towards more diversity and inclusivity in engineering and architecture through awareness, empowerment and action. Disability is woven through their 2025 Diversity Strategy (The Diversity Agenda, n.d.), in year one as a priority to increase awareness of disability and neurodiversity; and in year two by developing an approach to creating inclusive workplaces for disabled people. Their 2023 Insights report (The Diversity Agenda, 2023) has a section on disability where they explain the importance of collecting disability data and note that they have a work stream lead group focusing on raising awareness of disability in the workplace.

Conclusion and directions for future research

The primary research being undertaken by *All is for All* will fill a number of critical spaces in the scholarship on disability and employment in Aotearoa New Zealand; with respect to its industry-specific focus, its foregrounding of the experiences of disabled workers and their employers; and the involvement of disabled people as co-designers, researchers and participants. Together with this integrative literature review, the research will provide a foundation for Disability Action Plans for Hanga-Aro-Rau and Waihanga Ara Rau, which will in turn enable and promote employment for disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori and tagata sa'ilimalo that aligns with their skills and interests and is meaningful, stable, reliable and inclusive.

There are many possibilities for future primary research on the disability employment kaupapa, particularly in the context of the current and imminent changes associated with demographic change, Industry 4.0, increased automation and artificial intelligence. Research will also be critical to avoid replicating and embedding in the future the inequities disabled people currently experience across social, economic and health domains. Irrespective of whether the responsibility for ensuring that industry voice has a meaningful influence on skills and workforce development falls to Workforce Development Councils or some other organisation, there will still be a need to understand the education and training component of employment for disabled people. With this information need in mind, subsequent literature reviews could focus on transitions, for example between school and vocational education and employment; on the factors that contribute to the success of disabled people in vocational education, including work-based learning; and on the kinds of programmes that support disabled people and their employers from pre-recruitment through to retention.

An exploration of indigenous models of disability would also be a valuable resource, given Aotearoa New Zealand's settler colonial history; the inequities currently experienced by tāngata whaikaha Māori, and the absence of holism and/or collectivism in the models of disability from which policy and practice are developed here.

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