Let's level up –

Unlock the power of inclusivity and discover the potential of the disabled workforce.

Industry takeout

All is for All

HANGA-ARO-RAU
Manufacturing, Engineering and Logistics
Workforce Development Council

WAIHANGA ARA RAU
Construction and Infrastructure
Workforce Development Council

Why this research?

Industries like construction, engineering, infrastructure, logistics and manufacturing require support to meet future workforce demand. Support is also needed to improve recruitment and retention.[1] At the same time, 55.9 per cent of working-age disabled people are not participating in the labour force.[2]

A standard definition of disability is those who experience long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.[3]

> "It is about seeing the potential of disabled people, and we are not doing this routinely in Aotearoa, New Zealand."
> **- Employer**

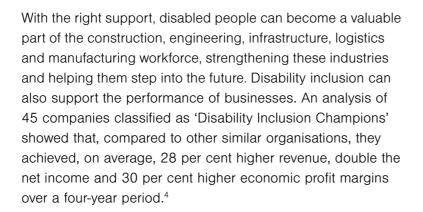## What is included in the definition of disability?

Physical disabilities	Impairments affecting mobility. These may require aids like prosthetics, walkers, or wheelchairs.
Neurodivergence	Different information processing including ADHD, autism, dyslexia, etc. Neuordivergence means these differences are seen as variations, not deficits.
Learning or intellectual disabilities	Lifelong cognitive impairments affecting learning and daily living.
Acquired or Traumatic Brain Injury	Brain injuries from illness or trauma, affecting cognitive function.
Chronic health conditions / invisible disabilities	Long-term illnesses (e.g., endometriosis, cancer) that may not be visible and may be dynamic, impacting people in different ways at different times.
Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Hearing Loss	Includes Deaf community members and those with functional hearing loss.
Blind, Low Vision, and DeafBlind people	Includes full or partial vision loss and dual sensory impairments.
Psychosocial disability / mental distress	Impacts from ongoing mental health conditions or episodic mental distress.

"But yeah, people limit themselves by what they know, I guess to a degree, and so people that are applying for jobs may look at that kind of thing and say, 'well, the only sort of job I can apply for is a sedentary job that sits at a desk, or you know, that kind of thing and [they believe our company] won't have those."

- Employer

With the right support, disabled people can become a valuable part of the construction, engineering, infrastructure, logistics and manufacturing workforce, strengthening these industries and helping them step into the future. Disability inclusion can also support the performance of businesses. An analysis of 45 companies classified as 'Disability Inclusion Champions' showed that, compared to other similar organisations, they achieved, on average, 28 per cent higher revenue, double the net income and 30 per cent higher economic profit margins over a four-year period.[4]

To unlock this potential, industries need to embrace both immediate and systemic changes, informed by industry and communities. That's why Hanga-Aro-Rau and Waihanga Ara Rau Workforce Development Councils (WDCs) commissioned All is for All to conduct this research—to understand what enables or prevents the inclusion of disabled people in their sectors. Over 270 employers contributed, highlighting industry interest in tackling this issue and paving the way for positive change.

"[It] requires a high degree of bravery on people being willing to put their hands up and say, hey, you know, I'm autistic, and I'm an engineer, and you know, that I suffer from ADHD and that sort of thing."

- Employer

What we discovered

More Conversation and Knowledge Sharing Needed: While 44 per cent of industry respondents have worked with disabled people, 51 per cent have never discussed disability or considered hiring more disabled workers. Employers are eager to learn, but this learning needs to evolve into ongoing conversations and shared knowledge to increase employment opportunities.[5]

Creating Safe Spaces for Disclosure: Many disabled workers are reluctant to disclose their disability, fearing it may cost them their job or limit their opportunities. While employers often want more transparency, building a safe environment for disclosure is a shared responsibility among all industry stakeholders.

Neurodivergence Considered 'Most Suitable': When asked whether their workplace was suitable for different disability types, the results showed that neurodivergence was considered the most suitable across industries. However, neurodivergent people indicated that more work was needed for their workplace to understand and support them. There is an opportunity to leverage employers' enthusiasm toward neurodivergence to support the development of suitable environments for these employees.

Concerns About Health and Safety: Over half of surveyed employers worry that hiring disabled people could increase health and safety risks. However, research suggests that these risks may be more about perception than reality because disabled people are successfully managing health and safety in their sector.[6] As industries gain a better understanding of disability, these concerns may ease.

Traditional Hiring Processes Overlook Disabled People: Many disabled candidates are overlooked in hiring. Racism, sexism, and other legacy behaviours add to the barriers experienced in the hiring process.

Room to Expand Bright Spots: While there are efforts to include disabled workers, these are often driven by the passion of individuals rather than at a system level. There's a big opportunity to tap into the potential of disabled people and create sustainable inclusion across industries.

Access to a Diagnosis is Key: Not every disabled employee has access to a diagnosis. The research found that a diagnosis is critical to support the enablement of disabled workers. It helps them better understand themselves, advocate for their needs, be understood by others and opens up stronger pathways to establish the right support in the workplace.

"My discovery of myself and my disability happened while I was in the workforce, and yeah, it was certainly something I kept to myself because I'd seen other people who were clearly keeping other things to themselves ... in the construction industry, [it was] quite eye-opening, because people are going to bottle that up and not say anything."

- Disabled person working in the construction industry

An overview of opportunities for action from the research

The research identified opportunities that, if fully implemented, could boost Aotearoa, New Zealand's economy and enhance industry productivity. Small wins and transformative changes are both needed to make a real impact. These opportunities were designed in collaboration with people who have lived and professional disability experience alongside industry experts. This inclusive practice was key to making the research relevant and valuable for all stakeholders.

You can view these at the report landing pages using the QR codes below.

Opportunities for employers to Level Up and realise the potential of disabled people in their workplace.

Assess available tools for disability inclusion and accessibility:

Employers already have access to a variety of tools that can enhance inclusion for disabled people by providing information like myth-busting, advice and guidance for HR and management. There is the MSD toolkit and employer guidance by Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People. There are also some existing industry resources for Neurodivergence in construction. As a quick win right now, you can use the available tools and consider how they apply to your industry and business. Some of these resources might not yet be fit for purpose, so a suggested opportunity of this research is the development of sector-specific resources.

Start a conversation:

An immediate step employers can take to enhance disability inclusion, and indeed inclusion for everyone, is to ask all employees and potential hires, "What support do you need to do your job?" This question fosters a culture of openness and shows your willingness to discuss accessibility. Ultimately, it helps you identify ways to better enable everyone in the workplace.

Integrate disability awareness as a regular workplace function:

This could involve initiatives such as learning basic New Zealand Sign Language, both to incorporate Sign Language in your workplace and to improve communication in noisy worksite environments. Each business unit can adopt practices that meaningfully enhance their understanding of disability, and these can be scaled to suit your business. A critical first step is developing a common vision that serves as a strong foundation for the actions required to become a disability-inclusive workplace.

To download the key findings, full report and references for this Industry takeout please visit the landing pages via the QR codes or by visiting hangaarorau.nz and waihangaarararau.nz

1 (Statistics New Zealand, 2023; Deloitte, 2022).
2 (Statistics New Zealand, 2023).
3 (United Nations, 2006).
4 (Accenture, 2018).
5 (All is for All, 2024).
6 (All is for All, 2024; See also Sheppard, 2023)

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