

Inclusivity Policies for Women with Disabilities

A Comparative study of
Canada, Norway, and Australia

The
Gender
Equity
Initiative



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Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Melbourne acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work, learn and live: the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong peoples (Burnley, Fishermans Bend, Parkville, Southbank and Werribee campuses), the Yorta Yorta Nation (Dookie and Shepparton campuses), and the Dja Dja Wurrung people (Creswick campus).

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The Gender Equity Initiative hosts talented University of Melbourne Master's student interns who lead projects across a range of gender equity issues. The interns produce reports covering pressing and timely topics in this area.

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Executive Summary

This report will explore the policies or lack thereof for women with disabilities focusing further on women with intellectual disabilities (IDs). The policies from Canada, Norway and Australia will be analysed. The level of success it has achieved or has aimed to achieved for the period of implementation and its accommodations for women with IDs will be discussed. Though there have been great improvements in accommodations for people with disabilities this report identifies a lack of such improvements when looking at the efforts put towards creating an equal and inclusive environment for women with IDs.

The research for this report will be performed through a literature review both of peer-reviewed research studies and articles as well as a review of officially documented reports of each country. Canada and Norway were chosen as countries considered to have some of the most successful policies and programs for people with disabilities. They both aim to support them in becoming independent members of society through the acquisition of jobs.

This report will firstly provide a short overview of the current state of people with disabilities in each country respectively. The relationship between gender and disabilities which has greatly impacted women with disabilities in getting employment will be explored. A review of the disability policies in each country will follow.

The report will firstly be analysing a disability policy in Canada:

- The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005

Secondly, the report will be analysing a disability policy in Norway:

- A Society for All

Which is the Norwegian government's strategy for the period of 2020-2030 outlining the actions and goals they aim to achieve for the period of implementation to create equality for people with disabilities in Norway.

Thirdly, the report will be looking at Australia and its policy:

- The National Disability Strategy (NDS)

This report will be looking at the original strategy dated for the period of 2010-2020 and its achievements. The areas of neglect specifically relating to the lack of mention of women with disabilities and gender-specific strategies obstructing progress for women with disabilities in obtaining employment in Australia.

Finally, the report will be looking at opportunities for improvement in Australian policies and programs to increase gender equality and awareness for the needs of women with disabilities. These recommendations are based off the successes and failures of policies in Canada and Norway.

1. Introduction

People with disabilities experience more difficulties navigating the societal environment around work and jobs. Governments and organisations have involved themselves in creating policies and programs to aid people with disabilities. They provide access to education and support during the probation period of a new job. The rate of success achieved using these policies and programs however are not always accurately reported. Disability is defined as “any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restriction)” (CDC, 2024). The focus of this report is on individuals within the community who identify a mental or behavioural disorder as their life-impacting disability.

Anderson, Gooding & McVilly (2017) begin their literature review stating that “the rates of social and economic inequality facing Australians with disability compared to their fellow citizens, are among the highest in the world” (Anderson, Gooding & McVilly, 2017). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2018, there were 2.1 million people with disabilities were of working age. 53.4% of those people were in the labour force with 47.8% being employed, compared to 84.1% of people without disabilities in the labour force and 80.3% being employed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Gender inequality further increase the barriers to entry specifically for women with disabilities in acquiring and maintaining a stable job. This report uses the definition of “gender” provided by the World Health Organisation, which states that “the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys ... are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy” (WHO, 2024).

In comparison to Australia, Canada and Norway are countries considered to have some of the better, most successful policies and programs for people with disabilities to support them in becoming independent members of society through the acquisition of jobs. This report aims to explore the various policies and programs which are accessible for people with disabilities in each country, outlining their purposes, methods, and success rates towards women with disabilities. The struggles encountered by women with disabilities in the workplace is a subject which needs more attention brought to it. The creation of effective policies and programs to support women with disabilities is needed to build their confidence and become independent members of society.

This report will first establish the relationship between gender and disabilities, and the various barriers encountered by people with disabilities. Their challenges to acquire and retain jobs whether supported by government or organisational programs and the impact which this has on their ability to sustain a presence in society. The report will then explore the disability policies and programs in Canada, Norway and Australia following the support obtained by women with disabilities through them. Lastly, the report will investigate opportunities Australia can gain and implement from the programs established in Canada and Norway to aid Australian women with disabilities feel more supported in participating in the labour force.

Research Method

This report will be conducted in the form of a literature review encompassing both previously conducted research from various sources as well as an analysis of each country's policies and acts. This method of research was selected due to the large quantity of data accessible, spanning across international borders for comparative purposes. To create a global view of how different countries develop their disability policies it is essential to analyse various publicly available statistics from each country to establish the success rate of these policies. As there is a limitation of published research to be analysed for women with disabilities, this report will be analysing preceding research specific to women with disabilities and people with disabilities in general to develop a holistic view of the topic. Additionally, as statistics on mental disabilities are misrepresentative of the true number of cases and groups of mental disabilities due to a lack of reporting, this report will include data from sources from organisations working with women with disabilities to provide anecdotal perspective from the main recipients themselves of the policies and support programs established.

The report acknowledges limitations in the creation of this literature review. Firstly, due to time constraints, the research will be limited to a literature review of online sources available to the public, especially official government documents.

Secondly, no data collection was performed specifically for the purpose of this report which limits the perspective which can be acquired from anecdotal evidence presented by the local population of Australia, Norway, and Canada at the time of the writing of this report. The data presented will be mostly quantitative and may not be representative of the real-life experiences encountered by women with disabilities.

Lastly, whilst statistics on people with disabilities remain stable across numerous years this is limited to the government acquired census data which is updated every five or ten years depending on the country. Due to the variation in time in which the data was collected across the countries analysed, the report can only review the captured information at the time of the original data collection and may not reflect present day circumstances.

2. About People with Disabilities

People with disabilities in Australia although being one of the largest minorities have struggled with feeling supported by the Australian government for decades. In 2017, the Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) which encompasses an alliance of four national organisations submitted their "Priorities for the 2017/2018 Federal Budget" to the Department of the Treasury. In accordance with numbers obtained from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) "Australia ranks 26 out of 27 OECD countries for the percentage of people with disability living in poverty" with "the most recent OECD ranking placed Australia 21st out of 29 OECD countries for employment participation of people with disability" (DPO Australia, 2017).

Information provided by the ABS show the unemployment rate for people with disabilities remaining stable since 2015. In 2018 "23.2% reported a mental or behavioural disorder as their main condition" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The Canadian Government reports similar statistics. Mental-health related disabilities encompassed 39% of the overall statistic of reported people with

disabilities, having been the largest increase of all the recorded disability types in the survey (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Norway, being the smallest country to be analysed in this report, gender inequality in Norway is significantly lower than other countries such as Canada and Australia. Recent research found that the probability of employment in 2008 saw no difference between men and women with disabilities in Norway (Martorell, Gutierrez-Recacha, Pereda, & Ayuso-Mateos, 2008). This is an improvement from research conducted in 1999, which found a higher probability for men to be employed over women with disabilities (McDermott, Martin, & Butkus, 1999).

The table below displays percentages compiled by the report to display the percentages of each country's population living with a disability as well as the percentage of the community of people with disability employed in comparison to people without disabilities.

Table 1. Representation of percentage differences by country of people living with a disability and their employment status.

Country	Percentage of the population with a disability	Percentage of disabled population employed	Percentage of non-disabled population employed
Canada	27%	53.5%	72.2%
Norway	18%	44%	73%
Australia	20%	48%	80%

Findings were compiled from several sources including Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2022; Statistics Norway, 2016.

2.1 The Relationship Between Gender and Disabilities

The relationship between gender and disability is actively being expanded upon as recent research continues to emphasise the differences in needs between men and women with disabilities. Mental health and mental health disorders have become an increasingly prevalent issue which has gained recognition because of the increase in work from home positions available to individuals. Employee mental health is a trending topic of discussion amongst all organisations. This is especially important for people already living with a mental health issue in receiving accommodations to enable them to perform adequate work whilst not straining their health. "Evidence indicates that most people living with disabilities want to work and have the capacity to do so" (Gignac, Jessiman-Perreault, Thompson & Smith, 2023). By providing the necessary accommodations in line with mental or cognitive disabilities an improvement in job tenure, and performance could be seen.

Gignac, Jessiman-Perreault, Thompson & Smith, 2023 suggest that "gender may also be an important factor because women report greater accommodation needs and a greater number of unmet workplace accommodation needs compared with men" Gender inequality is an ongoing topic of interest to society, however, gender inequality relating to people with disabilities requires greater

attention. Workplace accommodation needs specific for women with IDs are not clearly outlined. It is common for women to experience greater struggles with job security as well as limitations in the benefits offered to them by organisations. This is especially so for women with disabilities. A study done by Chouinard (2009) explored the experiences of women with disabilities with government employment assistance in Canada and the importance of their policies. The results showed that “many of the women with disabilities who responded to the survey regarded the employment assistance they have received as of very limited importance to their abilities to find and keep paid work” (Chouinard, 2009). Women with disabilities are already more likely to be living under the poverty line due to the lack of job security and lesser pay than women without disabilities and men with and without disabilities. Furthermore, many women who utilised services to aid their job acquisition, which provided employers with wage subsidies, encountered termination as soon as the payments stopped. They were then replaced by another worker with disabilities who still obtained wage subsidies. In accordance with anecdotal evidence, “Some employers hire and keep you until the money runs out, and after the program ends and part of your wages are not paid anymore, they suddenly can’t afford to keep you” (Chouinard 2009).

The push by organisations such as the Women with Disabilities Australia for gender inequality is a testament to the necessary evolution in policies and programs to address the current lack of participation by women with disabilities across Australia. A similar occurrence is taking place in Canada through the advocacy efforts of The DisAbled Women’s Network (DAWN) Canada. They are encouraging raising awareness of the needs and accommodations women with disabilities in Canada experience due to the lack of legislation specifically targeting women with disabilities and hence addressing women specific challenges in Canada.

3. Disability Policies in Canada

Disability policies in Canada are established and maintained on a provincial level, with each province enacting their own sets of policies and programs to support people with disabilities. However, most policies and programs in Canada target the community of people with disabilities rather than specifically pertaining to women with disabilities.

The lack of focus on the differing needs of men and women with disabilities can be seen as detrimental, as it does not accommodate the additional needs Canadian women with disabilities may have. In 2022, 43% of Canadian women were reported to be living with a severe disability, compared to 39% of men (Statistics Canada, 2022). When it comes to the topic of employment “more than one in ten women... aged 25 to 54 reported that they were refused a job in the past five years due to their condition” (Statistics Canada 2017). Gignac et al. (2023) state that “to support employee mental health, attention is needed to address work contexts and job conditions, especially for people working with mental/cognitive disabilities [and] women... where unmet accommodation needs are greatest”. To then combine the two categories of people with mental/cognitive disabilities and women together creates a difficult task of accommodation for those involved. Through the policies and programs enacted in various provinces of Canada, women with disabilities can seek support in looking for, acquiring, and retaining job opportunities.

The report will now be looking at a provincial policy for Ontario as an example of the support which can be acquired by people with disabilities..

3.1 The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005 (AODA)

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was established in 2005 with the purpose to support people with disabilities in Ontario by:

1. *(a) developing, implementing, and enforcing accessibility standards in order to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures, and premises on or before January 1, 2025; and*

(b) providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and of various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards.

-Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Through the AODA 2005 numerous standards were introduced in areas such as employment standards which dealt with fair and equal recruitment opportunities for people with disabilities applying for jobs. It is a requirement for employers to publicly provide the “availability of accommodation for applicants with disabilities in its recruitment processes” (Government of Ontario, 2005). Hence if the applicant is successful in obtaining the job the applicant must be notified of the employer’s policies for accommodating them. Arrangements for these changes should be made to provide the successful applicant with the necessary environment for them to perform their duties. These standards are created, introduced, and implemented through the Government of Ontario by collaboration with the disability community and other businesses supporting the act and providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

In 2022, the Government of Ontario aimed to raise awareness of the accessibility standards to provide people with disabilities with more opportunities in more organisations across Ontario meeting accessibility requirements. They have also continued their support of numerous programs and initiatives which aid people with disabilities find job opportunities. One such program is the Skills Development Fund which “supports ground-breaking programs that connect jobseekers with the skills and training they need to find well-paying careers close to home” (Government of Ontario, 2022).

The AODA 2005 whilst boasting of its success through the funding of multiple programs has been described as a failure by an independent reviewer appointed by the government. The goal of the review was to assess the impact of the Act across dimensions from the consultation of organisations as well as discussions with the primary recipients of aid, people with disabilities. As stated in the interim report, “there is a near unanimous consensus that the AODA is currently failing People with Disabilities. Experience design does not consider the functional needs of PWD and thus PWD receive poorer experiences than their peers” (Government of Ontario, 2023). Furthermore, there is a lack of

enforcement, leadership, and data to drive the programs forward to improve the experiences of people with disabilities. The lack of urgency placed on organisations to prioritise the implementation of the Act. Consequently, its enforcement to build opportunities for people with disabilities to work within their companies is lacking. Additionally, there is little public knowledge on which organisations are participating in the implementation of the necessary accommodations as well as what kinds of accommodations can be implemented.

4. Disability Policy in Norway

Norway is well known for its strong stance on the need for equality across all facets of their legislation, policies, and programs. Hence, they are also known for their “generous social benefits and comprehensive activation policies aimed at supporting and incentivising labour market participation” (Ballo, 2023) including that of equal participation of people with disabilities regardless of gender. Workforce inclusivity is a goal set with a political purpose, similarly to other countries, however, is taken very seriously by the Norwegian government. This is enacted through its promise for equal opportunities for people with disabilities, including people with IDs. The preservation is seen through the active implementation of day care centres for people with IDs as an alternative daily activity instead of finding employment. This is towards the belief that “employment for people with IDs may entail better opportunities for independent living, meaningful social participation and enhanced self-confidence” (Engeland, et al.2020) as it is estimated that close to “70% of Norwegians are registered with mild intellectual disabilities” (Engeland et al.2020).

The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration in cooperation with the central government of Norway are also dedicated to increasing employment rate for individuals finding it challenging to enter the workforce. As such people with IDs who wish to work are actively supported by the government in their recruitment into both open and sheltered employment. Engeland et al.2020 define sheltered employment as finding work in supervised environments such as sheltered workshops whilst open employment is mainstream employment with additional external support services provided. Employment in accordance with the legislation outlined by the Norwegian government is defined as “participation in mainstream or sheltered employment, and included activities with production in day care centres, whether it resulted in the limited salary in addition to a disability pension or not” (Ankeet al. 2023). 25.7% of people with mild IDs aged 20-69 were reported to be employed, while 6.3% were reported to be participating in day care activities (Engeland & Langballe, 2018). Whilst this number may appear low in comparison to the 70.7% of the general population of Norway being employed “the exact number of people with mild IDs in Norway is unknown” (Engeland et al.2020).

Ballo (2023) found that “disabled women experience additive career and income penalties related to disability”, due to the same gender inequity issues within labour markets which favour men. Furthermore, the disability wage penalty is more strongly experienced by men with disabilities compared to men without disabilities. However, ultimately men regardless of having disabilities or not “have higher predicted earnings than women” (Ballo, 2023) regardless of having a disability or not.

4.1 A Society for All

A Society for All is the Norwegian government's 2020-2030 strategy for equality of persons with disabilities lead by the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality. It is their belief that policies for people with disabilities "should be based on equality, self-determination, participation, involvement and inclusion" (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2019).

There are numerous goals outlined within the vision of the strategy, all with the goal of providing people with disabilities with opportunities to live independently through the provision of education and employment. Notable goals include:

- *Persons with disabilities should have equal access to public services and to society's institutions, without hindrance from physical conditions, surroundings, the organisation of the services of technical solutions.*
- *Persons with disabilities should have equal opportunities in order to be included and participate in all areas of society, without hindrance from physical conditions, a lack of accessibility, living conditions or discriminatory attitudes.*
- *Persons with disabilities should have the same opportunities as every other citizens to make decisions about their own lives. This includes being able to actively participate in the formulation of provisions, services, legislation, and policies that affect their everyday life, and having access to the support they may need for that purpose.*

(A Society for All, Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2019)

Under this strategy the Norwegian government acknowledge that employment increases individuals' sense of independence and is a counter to poverty which is experienced by people with disabilities. Commonly speaking, "disabled workers in general were characterized by lower educational levels" (Ballo, 2023), acknowledging that a higher level of education equates to a higher chance in obtaining and maintaining employment. Evidence show that low levels of education ultimately result in unemployment. A lower level of education is flagged by numerous employers as a risk when employing people with disabilities.

As a result of these concerns, the Norwegian government aims increase its focus on creating inclusive environments for people with disabilities by collaborating with employers and organisations to create a secure pathway for the employment. Studies have shown that when employers had given people with disabilities a chance at employment "about 60% of employers... have more positive attitudes" (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Equality, 2019). As such part of their promises for change remains to increase this percentage and providing resources to employers to adapt their workplace to the needs of people with disabilities.

5. Disability Policy in Australia

Throughout the years, Australia has increased its efforts to raise awareness of the challenges encountered by people with disabilities in their strategies, policies, and programs. People with IDs struggle even more due to discrimination and misconceptions of how their disability affects their day-to-day life. The challenges encountered by people with IDs is especially evident in the employment sector. Data from the ABS indicates that in 2012 there were 39% of people with intellectual disabilities employed in comparison to 55% of people with disabilities of other types (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). As such, there is a clear under-representation of people with intellectual disabilities in the Australian workforce even though people with disabilities including people with IDs “are often able and willing to work to become financially independent and to contribute towards community development and wider society” (Cartmel et al. 2016).

The Australian government has put into place numerous policies, programs, and services to support people with disabilities. This however has not helped the “continuing high unemployment rates for this population and the lack of an outcomes-focused approach to evaluating whether employment services are meeting the needs of people with intellectual disability and their families” (Dempsey & Ford, 2009). Additionally, little signs of improvement can be found, even when people with IDs are employed, due to poor working conditions experienced and perpetuated by employers. Due to the stereotypes associated with disabilities, employers have a tendency towards believing that by employing people with IDs their businesses production efficiency would decline. Some employers stating that they lack the resources to accommodate for their needs (Cartmel et al. 2016). Similarly to Norway, Australia also has varying types of employment for people with disabilities, including open and sheltered employment options. While there is a push for the creation of opportunities for open employment for people with IDs, the stigmatisation against disabilities is apparent. Reports of dismissive and discouraging attitudes encountered by people with IDs from employers in open employment positions ultimately result in many choosing to move towards sheltered employment options. This is often due to the long wait times for open employment jobs (Fisher et al. 2020).

Sands (2005) strongly ascertains that “women with disabilities in particular, are largely not recognised as a priority for development initiatives, aid programs, poverty-alleviation strategies and human-rights measures”, with little to no address towards them in discussions of policies, services, and programs. Hence, women with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty because of low incomes, as well as from a lack of accommodation and creation of support for their needs.

5.1 The National Disability Strategy (NDS)

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) was originally implemented between 2010-2020 and was Australia’s first policy framework towards disability reform in the country. It laid the foundations for the Australian government to improve the lives of people with disabilities. In its final progress report for the implementation period, numerous achievements were reported towards steps which were taken to facilitate a more inclusive and supported system of processes for people with disabilities. Some of these achievements include the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which the Australian government has labelled as “one of the most important social policy innovations in Australia’s history” (Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2021). As

well as further funding and new legislations towards creating inclusive, safe spaces for people with disabilities accessible to all as a connection with communities.

The Disability Employment Services (DES) was also introduced in 2018, to provide support in accessing long-term open employment in the mainstream workforce. It was recorded that “from 1 July 2018 to 28 February 2022, 588,145 people received assistance from DES, with 126,817 employed for 6 months or more” (Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2021). These figures can be considered a successful number due to the lack of successful precedent prior to the implementation of the NDS. However, the report was unsuccessful in finding data outlining a breakdown of how many of these people were categorised as being people with IDs in comparison to people with other disabilities. The percentage of individuals identifying as women with disabilities or any other intersectional groups was also a data set unrecorded in the NDS’ final progress report.

Fisher, Meltzer & Robinson (2020) performed a study exploring the processes for people with IDs to find and retain employment across varying types of employment options. It was determined that the kind of employment services and assistance provided through the government were inadequate in the help they provided. Many people with IDs utilising the services were only suggested to find job listings and advertisements for basic job opportunities. Their wishes for support towards jobs with higher requirements for entry were dismissed. Services to build new skills and attaining further professional development to aid their viability to remain competitive within the applicant pool “was not part of the specialist services’ purview” (Fisher et al. 2020). The major reason provided to several people with IDs utilising the services was that due to lack of funding the services were unable to provide financial support to people with IDs seeking to acquire higher qualifications in their field of interest.

Regarding women with disabilities specifically within the NDS, the implementation of the Women’s Leadership and Development Program (WLDP) aimed to grant women with disabilities more autonomy in acquiring employment and leadership opportunities. The program collaborated with Women with Disabilities Australia, an organisation who “represents and advocates for women, girls, feminine identifying and non-binary people living with disabilities across Australia”. (Women with Disabilities Australia, 2024). In accordance with the results of the NDS from its final progress report, the WLDP committed \$224,917 to the “Me Plus More” program. The program’s aim was to improve job readiness and provide employment opportunities for people with IDs, including opportunities of further education and information products for use by women and their support workers (Australian Government, Department of Social Services, 2021). The report however did not provide any figures of success for the program. Furthermore, a review conducted by the University of New South Wales Sydney in relation to the implementation of the NDS mentions that equality between men and women with disabilities was not a topic of reflection or priority within the strategy’s areas of interest. The review stated that the participation of women in the labour force has seen no improvement over the last two decades and no mention of “any gender-specific measures to ensure the rights of women and girls with disability” (Davy et al. 2018) was found in the NDS. Hence, women with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or remain employed in low-wage jobs in comparison to men with disabilities and women without disabilities.

6. Opportunities for Improvement in Australia for Women with Disabilities

Australia can and should evolve the policies and programs currently being used to support people with disabilities. The government should aim to accommodate the specific needs of women with IDs in the workplace and protect them from gender inequality and discrimination due to the stereotypes associated with their disability.

1. Data, Analytics & Research Transparency & Accessibility

At present there is a lack of data and analytics publicly published about the success or failure to improve the lives of women with disabilities. This is also true regarding research conducted to obtain information on what the needs of women with disabilities are and the accommodations they seek to see both short- and long-term support. By taking example from the recommendations provided by the 4th reviewer of The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, there should be an ongoing set of accessible data and analytics provided to the public as well as to organisations seeking to employ people with disabilities. (Government of Ontario, 2023). This should be launched by the Australian government through the creation of a research team for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and data analysis to be available to the public.

This task could also be outsourced to universities and research organisations across Australia, to obtain varying sets of data which can be compiled and utilised to display the success or areas of improvement the Australian government should prioritise.

The release of data and potential collaboration with research organisations would also show the ability for the Australian government to remain transparent and accountable to women with disabilities.

2. Workplace Policies for Accommodations for Women with Disabilities

As outlined previously women with disabilities find it challenging to obtain and retain jobs. This is partially due to the lack of accommodations organisations can make for them. Organisations should be required to provide a list to potential applicants on the accommodations they can make for women with disabilities. Thus, the women applying may obtain a better understanding of what they can expect from the organisation.

Furthermore, as part of the legislation already in place for the funding of programs relating the employment opportunities and employment services, transparency should be provided as to where the funding for the services is being utilised.

As part of their strategy for 2020-2030 the Norwegian government as promised to increase the positive response and attitudes of employers towards people with disabilities. The Australian government can follow Norway's strategy by provide services to organisations for women with disabilities so that they can remain efficient in the roles they perform in their jobs. These services could be the form of additional training or coaching services for employees. These additional training or coaching services

can be in collaboration with organisations such as Women with Disabilities Australia to create a support system which women with IDs can rely upon. Furthermore, raising awareness in the workplace can also be an additional goal implemented into these services to include people without disabilities to better understand the needs of their co-workers.

Funding for the additional services could be provided as part of legislation already in place by the Australian government for other programs to be firstly advertised to organisations as a free trial. The services would then be sustained through increased tax rate for corporations.

3. National Awareness Campaigns for Women with Disabilities & People with IDs

Whilst there are numerous campaigns, programs, and initiative in place by the Australian government to raise awareness of the challenges encountered by people with disabilities, there is a minimal number which focus specifically on the recognition of women with disabilities and their rights to obtain equal, discrimination-free, and supportive work environment.

The goals for these campaigns should be outlined and should “include concrete, gender-specific, targeted actions and measures to increase employment participation of women with disabilities” (Women with Disabilities Australia, 2014). This would enable the accurate tracking of progress for an inclusive environment for women with disabilities in combination with consistent data collection and analysis to target areas of concern.

Norway is a great example of the government having a prominent presence in maintaining and enhancing the idea of equal rights and the idea of connections with the community to learn about the needs of women with disabilities in gender-specific programs and campaigns.

By creating collaborations with advocacy organisations such as Women with Disabilities Australia campaigns messages featuring the challenges encountered by women with disabilities as well as their need for equal rights can be advocated for. Areas of the government such as the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the National Mental Health Commission should collaborate in creating impactful and government funded campaigns aimed towards the general population and more specifically to employers to provide knowledge about women with IDs. These campaigns should be implemented after considerable discussions and following guidance from advocacy organisations working alongside women with disabilities.

7. Conclusion

The report provided an overview of policies relating to people with disabilities and their inclusion or exclusion of gender-specific areas of focus in Canada, Norway, and Australia. By taking into consideration the successes and failures of the varying policies, this report recommended several opportunities for improvement for Australia’s current policy landscape. By analysing Canada which

operates similarly to Australia the report was able to learn of potential areas of improvements which can be implemented in Australia. In contrast, Norway was analysed due to the prominent presence of the government in making sure that equality is maintained throughout their policies. The Australian government can take example from Norway, to connect with the community of women with disabilities and learn of the gender-specific needs they require.

These opportunities for improvement are also applicable to organisations already employing and those who may consider employing people with disabilities in the future. Information must be made accessible to build a better understanding of the benefits of employing women with disabilities, instead of focusing on the potential negative stereotypes associated with disabilities.

This report has highlighted the need for more action to be taken to address the needs of women with disabilities, which have so far have not been of priority in Australian policy. This has left women with disabilities, especially those with IDs, disadvantaged in gaining independence on a financial level due to lack of support for employment.

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