



Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre
School of Psychology and Public Health

OLGA TENNISON AUTISM RESEARCH CENTRE:

Response to the Select Committee on Productivity in Australia

ENQUIRIES

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Every Autistic person carries inherent value, regardless of their capacity to participate in paid employment. They shape communities, culture, and connection in ways that extend far beyond traditional economic measures.

Acknowledgement of Country

La Trobe University's Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) acknowledges that we work on the unceded lands of many traditional Indigenous custodians in Victoria and across Australia. We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to our research, to La Trobe University, and to wider Australian society. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and thank them for their ongoing care of this beautiful country's land, skies, and waterways.

Diversity

OTARC is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination. We will develop and sustain a culture where access, diversity, and inclusivity are recognised, valued, and celebrated. We welcome all people irrespective of neurotype, ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

Lived experience

OTARC's research could not happen without the individual and collective contributions of those with lived experience of neurodivergence, and those who love and care for them. We acknowledge and value their unique expertise. Their perspectives are crucial to our mission to enrich the lives of Autistic people, their families, and their carers through high-quality scientific research, innovation, and translation, and our vision for a world where Autistic people, their families, and their carers thrive.

Research participants

OTARC would like to acknowledge our research participants whose invaluable contributions make our work possible. Their commitment and willingness to share their time, experiences, and perspectives have significantly advanced our understanding of autism and the potential impact of our research.

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INTRODUCTION

La Trobe University’s Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Productivity in Australia. OTARC is Australia’s first and largest autism research centre, dedicated to producing high-quality research that improves outcomes for Autistic people¹ and their families.

“Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference, characterised by challenges with social communication and interaction, and engagement in non-social differences, such as repetitive behaviours, intense interests, and/or unusual sensory experiences including sensory hyper-reactivity.”²

OTARC works in partnership with Autistic people, families, employers, service providers, and governments to co-design research and translate evidence into practice. Our research aims to support Autistic people and their families in actively participating in their community, education, and employment, finding enjoyment in life, and making meaningful contributions aligned with their goals. A strong and inclusive labour market is central to this aim. Improving employment outcomes for Autistic people is a productivity opportunity.

This submission draws on OTARC’s research in vocational engagement, labour market participation, and workplace inclusion, alongside the broader national and international evidence base. **It addresses Terms of Reference C, D, and F**, with a focus on labour force participation, structural barriers to sustainable growth, and opportunities for states and territories to drive productivity growth.

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¹ Autistic is capitalised in line with feedback received from members of the Autistic community. Autistic is also capitalised in the National Autism Strategy.

² Roche et al (2025); We will use identity first language in the OTARC language statement – <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/statements/statement-on-language-and-participatory-research>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government should invest in the development, coordination, and scaling of evidence-based tools that support employers to reduce structural barriers for Autistic people across recruitment, onboarding, and employment. This investment would lift productivity by increasing effective labour supply and reducing the costs associated with recruitment failure, under-employment, and premature workforce exit, by enabling better job-person match and reducing avoidable turnover. This investment should:

- Align with the National Autism Strategy, including its guiding principles.
- Prioritise co-designed, autism-informed resources.
- Curate, quality-assure, and promote existing effective resources (including public-sector toolkits).

Recommendation 2: The Australian Government should explicitly recognise inclusive recruitment reform as a productivity lever and support its uptake across public and private sectors. For example:

- Incentivising skills-based and task-based recruitment methods (e.g. work trials, practical assessments) where appropriate, to improve job matching outcomes for all candidates.
- Support employers, Human Resource practitioners, recruitment professionals, supervisors, and line managers to embed inclusive recruitment and hiring practices into their workplaces.

Recommendation 3: The Australian Government should explore innovative approaches to improve retention and reduce under-utilisation of Autistic people's skills and capabilities by improving alignment between Autistic people's strengths and the work environments and roles. The Australian Government should explore the development, trial, and evaluation of structured matching approaches between the person and the job, career, and sector.

Recommendation 4: The Committee should recognise the current fragmentation of education-to-employment transitions as a structural productivity issue and recommend coordinated action across education, employment, and industry systems. Actions may include:

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities across schools, tertiary providers, employment services, and employers.
- Embedding transition supports as standard practice.

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Recommendation 5: State and territory governments should invest in early, sustained career development supports for young Autistic Australians. Support should begin in secondary school and extend through post-school transitions. These supports should:

- Enable young people to explore career pathways early.
- Build work-readiness skills that are strongly linked to job sustainability, including self-advocacy, understanding workplace expectations, and recognising individual strengths.
- Equip school-based career practitioners and guidance counsellors with autism-informed tools and training.

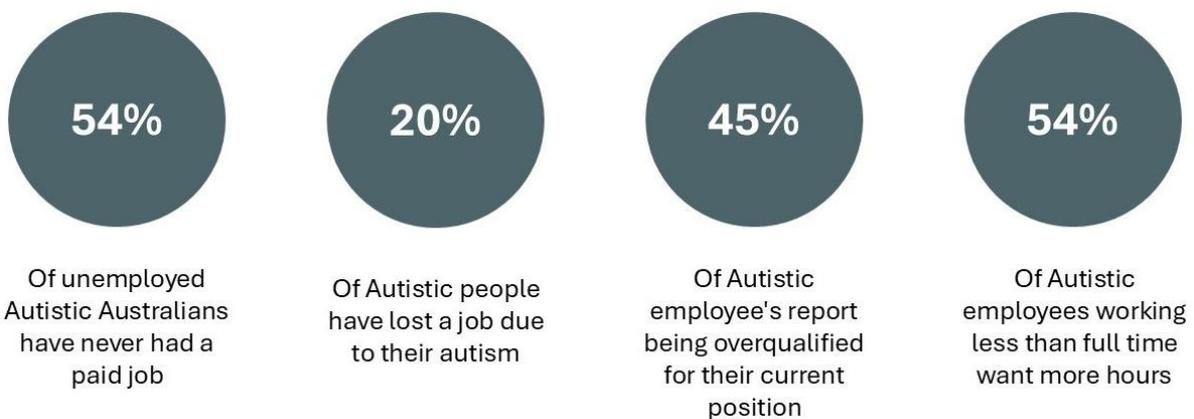
C.1 AUTISTIC LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

Australia could add almost \$50 billion to our GDP by 2050 if it matches the disability employment rates of the top eight OECD nations.³

In 2022, there were 290,900 Autistic Australians, yet Autistic people have the lowest labour force participation of any disability group (50.2% vs 60.5%), representing a significant component of unrealised productivity potential.⁴

Figure 1 shows the significant gaps in labour force participation and job matching that contribute to productivity loss.⁵ Despite clear evidence of skills and motivation to work, Autistic Australians are under-employed relative to their skills and career aspirations.⁶ This research reflects structural inefficiencies rather than individual capabilities.

Figure 1: Key employment statistics from the 2019 Amaze Autism and Employment Research Report



"I'm 52, two degrees, haven't worked a real job since 1997 unless you count \$20/hour dogsbody stuff for [employer name omitted] which ended back in 2008." (Autistic man, aged 52, unemployed)⁷

The Australian National Autism Strategy (2025–2031) identifies **economic inclusion as a priority action area**, recognising Autistic Australians' poor employment outcomes.⁸ Low labour force participation contributes to increased reliance on income support and health services, and to reduced tax revenue, placing pressure on the Australian budget. The Australian government has an opportunity to mitigate this by improving employment outcomes for Autistic people.

Considering the significant potential GDP gains and the strong evidence base showing that many Autistic people want to and can work with the right supports,⁹ improving

³ PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia (2011)

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022, 2018)

⁵ Jones et al (2019)

⁶ Davies et al (2024); Abeysekara et al (2025); Jones et al (2019)

⁷ Hayward et al (2019)

⁸ Department of Social Services (2024)

⁹ Hedley et al (2022)

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Autistic labour force participation should be considered a high-impact productivity target.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR AUTISTIC PEOPLE

Our research and a large body of international research indicates that many Autistic adults face significant barriers to gaining and maintaining meaningful employment as a result of:¹⁰

- Stigma and discrimination
- Limited work experience and training opportunities
- Recruitment practices that disadvantage Autistic applicants (e.g. unclear job ads, formats that don't effectively capture the capabilities and skills of Autistic applicants).
- Poor transition supports from education to employment
- Workplace environments that are not suitable for Autistic employees' sensory, communication, or cognitive processing needs
- Insufficient employment supports and transition-to-work supports
- Disability Employment Services (DES) not meeting the needs of Autistic jobseekers¹¹
- Limited availability and accessibility of autism employment initiatives
- Poor recognition and support of common co-occurring mental health challenges impacting workforce participation
- A lack of understanding of autism among employers, supervisors, and colleagues including communication differences:

"Although autism has traditionally been seen as a social-communication deficit, recent research suggests, as Autistic people have long argued, that the problem is bidirectional, with non-autistic people's difficulties understanding, interacting with, and accepting Autistic people contributing to Autistic people's social isolation and un-/under-employment."¹²

Our research shows that supports delivered by providers who understand autism and the needs of Autistic adults are the most effective.¹³ Without autism-informed training, clear pathways, and inclusive environments, these barriers will continue to limit participation and reduce Australia's potential for productivity growth.

¹⁰ Hedley et al (2017a, 2017b, 2019, 2021, 2025); Hayward & Flower (2023); Hayward et al (2023); Richdale et al (2022); Haschek (2025); Flower et al (2021); Black et al (2019, 2020)

¹¹ DES, now known as Inclusive Employment Australia (since Nov 2025)

¹² Hedley et al (2025, pg 19)

¹³ Hayward & Flower (2023)

C.2 OPPORTUNITIES TO GAIN PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH

Australia's productivity challenge highlights the importance of improving labour market utilisation. Autistic people represent a significantly under-utilised source of capability, not because of lower productivity, but because conventional recruitment and workplace practices are often poorly aligned with their strengths. The 2023 JobAccess report¹⁴ details the multiple benefits of employing Autistic people:

- **Cost-effective** – average cost-benefit ratio of 5:28.
- **Sought-after skills** – close attention to detail, high levels of trustworthiness, integrity, honesty, reliable, precise, efficient, consistent and a positive work ethic.
- **Lower turnover rates** – one study reported a 7% turnover rate for Autistic employees.¹⁵

Additionally, our research, along with that of international colleagues, provides clear and actionable pathways to improve employment outcomes for Autistic Australians. For example, a 2019 study asked Australian and Swedish employers about factors that facilitated the successful employment of Autistic people, finding three interconnected themes:¹⁶

1. **Autism knowledge and understanding** are facilitated through training, using effective communication strategies, and enabling relationships.
2. **A supportive work environment**, including consideration of physical environment, work task format, routine, and structure.
3. **Job matching** through the identification of unique skills, strengths, and interests in employee profiles.

Together, the evidence supports the use of targeted, autism-informed employment approaches to address skills shortages, strengthen workforce stability, and deliver measurable productivity gains for employers and the broader economy. Figure 2 outlines two priority opportunities: improving Autistic talent recruitment practices and strengthening retention strategies.

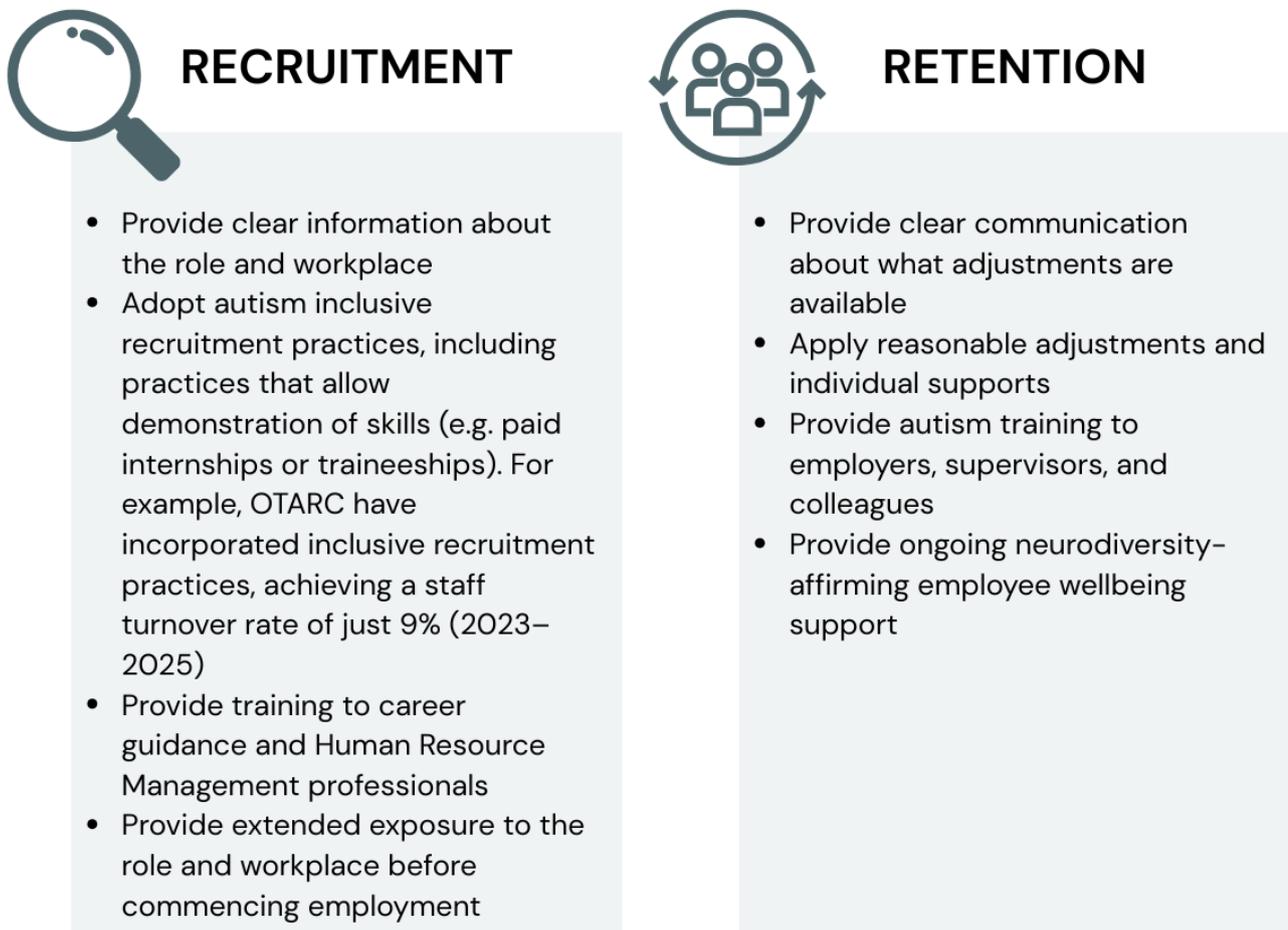
¹⁴ JobAccess (2023)

¹⁵ Griffiths et al (2020)

¹⁶ Dreaver et al (2020)

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Figure 2: Recruitment and retention strategies for successful Autistic employee outcomes¹⁷



Recent innovations, such as the Dandelion Program to support Autistic people in gaining meaningful employment and the Better Outcomes and Successful Transition for Autism¹⁸ have been developed to improve workplace accessibility for Autistic people.

¹⁷ Haschek (2025), Bölte et al (2025)

¹⁸ Hatfield et al (2017)

A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM EXAMPLE: DXC DANDELION PROGRAM¹⁹

The DXC Dandelion Program is a 3-year autism-informed employment program that connects Autistic people with meaningful employment within the information technology sector, helping to fill critical skills gaps in that industry.

The program has been implemented in Australian workplaces, including the Australian Government Departments of Defence, Human Services (now Services Australia), and Department of Home Affairs. Success in Australia led to the program being implemented to date in the United Kingdom, Poland, Bulgaria, and the Philippines. The program replaces traditional interviews with a four-week training and selection process, allowing potential employees to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in simulated environments. This innovative process replaces traditional recruitment interviews, which have been found to disadvantage Autistic people.²⁰

Outcomes

We independently evaluated the Dandelion program through interviews, focus groups, and surveys, finding that:²¹

- Autistic employees had increased confidence, stability, and career progression.
- Employers benefited from strong performance and retention (e.g. year 1, only 1.8% of Autistic employees exited the program).
- Benefits exceed costs from the first year of implementation.
- The program provided support for transition to further employment, regardless of program completion. For example, 87.5% of those who did not complete the program transitioned to open employment.

"The program generated a high benefit ratio for government, mainly driven by increases in wage rates and hours worked and avoiding welfare and unemployment benefit payments. Participants received the largest benefit through wages and access to the labor market, with most participants transitioning into productive, open employment following program completion."²²

Cost-benefit analysis estimates a net gain (per Autistic participant) of AU\$439,158 over 20 years, and AU\$834,078 over 40 years.

¹⁹ Nicholas et al (2019); Krzeminska et al (2019); Hedley et al (2017a, 2017c, 2019, 2022); PricewaterhouseCoopers (2015)

²⁰ Flower et al (2021)

²¹ Hedley et al (2022)

²² Hedley et al (2022)

D. STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Australian and international research identifies a number of barriers to sustainable growth that could be targets for action.

WORKPLACE CULTURE AND PERSISTENT MISCONCEPTIONS

Workplace culture remains a significant barrier to the labour force participation of Autistic people, driven by misconceptions about capability, productivity, and cost. Australian research shows that many employers continue to assume that Autistic people struggle to perform effectively at work, are unsuited to leadership or professional roles, or require costly and complex adjustments.²³ These assumptions lack supporting evidence, shaping recruitment and career progression, limiting labour force participation, and resulting in employers missing out on productive staff. A 2017 Australian employer survey found that Autistic employees were at least as productive as their non-Autistic peers, showcasing valuable skills in attention to detail, work ethic, and quality of work, while also contributing positively to workplace culture, creativity, and inclusion.²⁴ It also found that organisations incur no additional costs when employing an Autistic person beyond those associated with any new employee, particularly when standard supervision, training, and reasonable adjustments are in place.

Addressing these cultural barriers requires policy action that shifts responsibility away from individuals and towards systems and employers.

RIGID RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION SYSTEMS

Rigid and standardised recruitment and selection systems continue to exclude Autistic people from employment, regardless of capability or skill. Amaze's 2019 employment report shows that a lack of employer understanding and difficulty navigating interviews are among the most commonly reported barriers to employment for Autistic people, even where individuals have the skills and motivation to work.²⁵ Sixty-seven percent of Australian employers rely on conventional hiring practices (e.g. formal application and interview), often placing heavy importance on domains related to cultural fit, including personality (43%), communication skills (22%), and the strength of verbal responses (13%).²⁶ Unfortunately, these factors don't always reflect how well someone can do the job. These processes can disadvantage Autistic candidates who may need a different way to demonstrate their skills and capabilities.

Recent research exploring the experiences of Autistic people on hiring and recruitment processes found that Autistic people reported a preference for hiring practices that more closely reflected the skills required for the role.²⁷ Work-based trials, such as

²³ Jones et al (2019), Scott et al (2017)

²⁴ Scott et al (2017)

²⁵ Scott et al (2017)

²⁶ Jobs and skills Australia (2024)

²⁷ Davies et al (2023)

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practical tasks or work-trials, were reported as preferred alternatives to traditional interview formats:

"I would like to see more work trial or work exercise style interviews where people are put in realistic work situations. . . I feel that's the only way to assess how someone could manage the role".²⁸

Autistic people in this study also wanted less ambiguity and more clarity in the job description and interview questions, more consideration of the environments in which interviews were conducted, and more flexibility in the recruitment process. While these minor adjustments are likely to improve equity for Autistic job seekers, they are changes that are likely to benefit any job seeker.

TRADITIONAL MODELS OF WORK AND LIMITED FLEXIBILITY

Traditional models of work (e.g. fixed hours, physical presence, and standardised ways of working) limit the labour force participation of Autistic people and impose avoidable costs on Australia's productivity. For Autistic employees in particular, rigid work patterns can exacerbate sensory stress, reduce efficiency, and limit job sustainability,²⁹ contributing to under-utilisation of skills and premature workforce exit.

Federal policy settings reinforce these traditional models of work. Access to flexible work arrangements is often restricted, requiring a minimum period of employment and, in some cases, formal disclosure or documentation of disability.³⁰ These constraints delay or prevent reasonable flexibility, increasing the risk of job mismatch, underperformance, or early exit from the workforce.

Recent reforms, such as Australia's Right to Disconnect under the Fair Work Act, signal growing recognition that traditional work norms are misaligned with wellbeing and performance. However, flexibility remains framed as an exception rather than a default. By contrast, in the United Kingdom, flexible working arrangements can be requested by all employees from their first day of employment.³¹

Flexible work can improve Autistic employees' productivity when it is individualised and paired with clear structure and support.³² A large-scale United Kingdom study³³ found that flexible and home-working arrangements were associated with more positive employment outcomes for neurodivergent employees. In particular, for Autistic individuals, access to more flexible working arrangements (such as the ability to vary start and finish times), helped support longer job tenure.

However, while the research indicates that flexible working arrangements can improve job retention and wellbeing, they can also uncover unmet potential. When flexi-term time practices are available, these individuals, on average, want to work an additional 6 hours

²⁸ Davies et al (2023)

²⁹ Jones et al (2019), Scott et al (2017)

³⁰ Fair Work Ombudsman (2026)

³¹ United Kingdom government (retrieved Jan 2026)

³² Hedley (2017b)

³³ Branicki et al (2024)

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per week³⁴. This trend highlights that flexibility alone is not sufficient. Without attention to job design, workload allocation, and progression pathways, flexible work risks entrenching under-employment rather than realising their labour force participation potential.

FRAGMENTED TRANSITION PATHWAYS FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT

Despite substantial individual and public investment in education and training, many Autistic Australians do not successfully transition into employment that reflects their skills, qualifications, and career goals. This results in high levels of under-employment and labour force exclusion, representing a lost return on investment for individuals and governments, including through HECS-HELP and publicly funded education systems.

Our research shows that access to transition supports from education to employment is generally low (39%–43%), despite 60% of Autistic young adults wanting more assistance.³⁵ In interviews, Autistic adolescents identified a need for continued and timely guidance when moving from a structured school environment into more independent career settings:

“Andy, for instance, worried about the lack of guidance in the workplace, stating, ‘it’s like a big life change, because you don’t get guidance when you are at work . . . It’s not like a teacher’s going to teach you what to do. So, I’m worried about that a lot’. Taylor added that this kind of guidance should begin early, ‘I’m not talking from end of year 12. I’m talking about now, when we actually have the imagination and freedom’.”³⁶

The gaps described by Autistic Australians represent a loss of human capital at the point of labour market entry. Closing these gaps would ensure that the government maximises its investment in education and training, insulating it from unsustainable force participation.

³⁴ Branicki et al (2024)

³⁵ Richdale et al (2022), White et al (2025)

³⁶ White et al (2025)

F. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE STATES AND TERRITORIES TO DRIVE GROWTH

Autistic Australians represent an under-utilised source of skills and capability in the workforce because education systems, employment practices, and workplace environments are often poorly aligned to the needs of Autistic people. This results in skills developed through publicly funded education and training not being consistently translated into sustained employment, reducing labour force participation and productivity. States and territories are well placed to strengthen workforce capability and improve education-to-workforce transitions, releasing existing skills and enhancing returns on public investment.

STRENGTHENING WORKFORCE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT AUTISTIC EMPLOYEES

The surrounding physical and social working environment of Autistic employees, including employer and colleague attitudes and perceptions, are consistently recognised as significant determinants of employment success for Autistic people.³⁷ In fact, evidence from international key stakeholders proposes that environmental factors may be the most critical factor influencing outcomes for Autistic employees, both through their direct impact and through assisting in overcoming other systematic and inter-personal barriers.³⁸

Our research shows that employee attitudes and perceptions impact both the recruitment and retention of Autistic employees. Even before considering employing an Autistic person, employers may hold inaccurate beliefs about the costs and requirements associated with employing Autistic people, as well as their capabilities.³⁹

Once employed, misconceptions held by employers and colleagues, as well as a poor environment-person fit, can continue to influence long-term success, contributing to high turnover, reduced job satisfaction, and increased institutional costs associated with hiring, onboarding, and training.

Often, increased employer and colleague support, along with environmental modifications, are sufficient to overcome barriers experienced by Autistic employees in the workplace. However, very few interventions and supports focus specifically on these factors.⁴⁰ Strengthening the capacity of the Australian workforce to effectively support Autistic employees provides a clear tangible approach to improve both the recruitment and retention outcomes for Autistic people. For example:

1. **Promoting more inclusive and diversity-friendly recruitment practices**
2. **Upskilling career counsellors and human resource practitioners** to better support pre- and post-employment outcomes
3. **Providing co-produced and evidence-based resources to employers, colleagues, and hiring managers** to strengthen understanding of autism, support

³⁷ Jones et al (2019); Martin et al (2023)

³⁸ Black et al (2019)

³⁹ Scott et al (2017), JobAccess (2023)

⁴⁰ Scott et al (2019)

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needs, workplace modifications and adjustments, and communication and management.

See Figure 2 (section [C.2](#)) for a full list of recruitment and retention strategies to improve Autistic people’s employment outcomes.

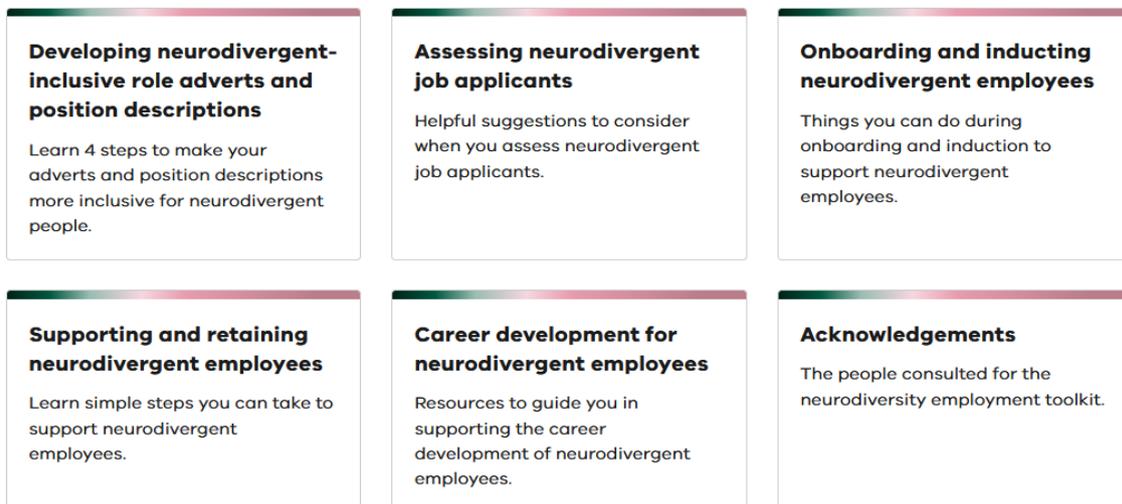
The following examples demonstrate that existing public-sector toolkits and autism-specific training programs can be embedded across large workforces, benefiting Autistic employees, employers, and the broader economy.

The Victorian public sector Neurodiversity Employment Toolkit⁴¹

Led by La Trobe University and the Victorian Public Sector Commission (VPSC), the Neurodiversity Employment Toolkit (released November 2024) is a resource developed with neurodivergent employees, managers, and human resource practitioners that provides information on recruiting and supporting neurodivergent employees (including those who are Autistic).

The toolkit provides simple, evidence-informed information for employers on what neurodiversity is, speaking respectfully about neurodiversity, creating inclusive role advertisements, and inclusively assessing, onboarding, supporting, and retaining neurodivergent employees. The suggestions for employers apply to any industry and to all job seekers and employees (i.e., regardless of whether an employer is actively seeking neurodivergent applications or whether they know they have neurodivergent employees).

Neurodivergent employees can also use the toolkit as a resource for learning about things that might assist them and starting discussions with their employer.



While developed for the Victorian public sector, the resource is freely available, and the information is relevant to any organisation.

⁴¹ Victorian Public Sector Commission (2024); <https://www.vpsc.vic.gov.au/leading-public-sector-organisations/supporting-diversity-public-sector/people-disability/neurodiversity-employment-toolkit>

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South Australian (SA) government Autism Awareness and Understanding Training⁴²

Established by the Office for Autism to support the delivery of the SA Autism Inclusion Charter, all government employees in SA now have access to co-developed Autism Awareness and Understanding Training (1 hour, in-person or online) to improve foundational knowledge across roles, teams, and agencies. An Autistic facilitator delivers the training, focusing on increasing awareness and confidence among employees and employers rather than prescribing a single way of working. Key areas covered in the training include:

- An overview of autism
- Myths and facts
- Autistic strengths
- Inclusion strategies

The SA Government has also developed a suite of resources freely available to employers, employees, and job seekers. These include practical guidance on inclusive recruitment, workplace adjustments, onboarding and supervision, and information to help Autistic people navigate workplace expectations and identify supports that work for them.



Key takeaways for employers:

1. Employing Autistic people can benefit you, your workplace and your business
2. Inclusive strategies are often simple, and free to implement. It is a myth that inclusivity has to be expensive.
3. If you would like more information to help you continue your roadmap towards autism inclusion, contact the Office for Autism.

This initiative demonstrates how states can strengthen workforce capability in ways that are proportionate, scalable, and sustainable.

⁴² <https://www.officeforautism.sa.gov.au/get-involved/autism-training>; Image: screenshot from <https://www.officeforautism.sa.gov.au/autism-works/for-employers>

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IMPROVE SUPPORTS FOR EDUCATION–TO–WORKFORCE TRANSITIONS

Strengthening transition supports is a clear opportunity for states and territories to improve employment outcomes for Autistic Australians and boost future workforce capacity. States and territories can drive productivity growth by:

- **Improving access to co-designed, practical transition supports** for all Autistic high school students and their families.
- **Building teacher and school staff capability** so they understand available pathways and supports for Autistic students.
- **Implementing neuroinclusive practices** in line with the National Autism Strategy to improve retention and participation in secondary and tertiary education.
- **Embed neurodiversity-affirming approaches in TAFEs and universities**, creating predictable, sensory-aware and supportive environments that improve course completion and pathways to skilled employment.
- **Providing targeted transition supports**, including:⁴³
 - career and further education planning
 - work-preparation programs
 - communication supports, such as speech pathology.

Improving transitions is an equity and productivity imperative, ensuring that skills developed through education are not lost at the point of labour market entry, but are translated into meaningful, sustained employment.

⁴³ Richdale et al (2022) – feedback from young Autistic Australians

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

La Trobe University undertakes world-class, high-impact research that addresses the major issues of our time. La Trobe placed in the top 250 universities globally (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2024) and is ranked 18th globally in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 – Decent work and economic growth (2024). La Trobe's broad fields of research are rated by the Federal Government at above or well above world standard.

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

La Trobe University's School of Psychology and Public Health supports impactful, inclusive research focused on employment. The School fosters expertise across psychology, counselling, therapy, and public health. It is strongly committed to social equity, leading innovative, multidisciplinary research that addresses complex challenges across the life course. It has extensive partnerships with industry, government, and community, particularly in regional and underserved areas, as well as real-world translation and policy relevance.

THE OLGA TENNISON AUTISM RESEARCH CENTRE (OTARC)

OTARC is situated in the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia. Founded in 2008 with the generous support of Mrs Olga Tennison AO, the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre is Australia's first, and largest centre, dedicated to autism research. We're here to create real change for Autistic people. Our work brings together researchers, professionals, Autistic people and those who support them to turn our research into practical supports. We design and evaluate support programs, services and clinical tools, train professionals, and partner with communities and organisations across Australia and the world.

LA TROBE BUSINESS SCHOOL

The La Trobe Business School is enhancing learning through education and research that is future-focused, applied, innovative and responsible. Through their worldwide network of partnerships and collaborations, they are uniquely positioned to deliver innovative solutions, to act on opportunities, to educate the next generation of ethical business leaders and produce impactful research that benefits business and society.

SCHOOL OF ALLIED HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND SPORT

Comprising three departments: the Department of Community and Clinical Health, the Department of Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Prosthetics and Orthotics and the Department of Sport, Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, our goal is to transform health and wellbeing education, research and practice.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Dr Jennifer Spoor *Associate Professor, Management/HRM, La Trobe Business School and Research Director (Vocational Engagement), Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, La Trobe University*

Dr Spoor leads research teams and supports capacity building on projects that aim to benefit neurodivergent people and people living with disability, employers and broader society through meaningful work and a strengths-based approach.

Dr Melissa Black *Associate Professor, Occupational Therapy, La Trobe University*

Dr Black's multidisciplinary work focuses on employment, education, and mental health. Melissa is committed to co-produced, community-engaged research and regularly collaborates with Autistic and other neurodivergent individuals to ensure that research priorities are meaningful and grounded in lived experience.

Dr Rebecca Flower *Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Counselling, and Therapy, La Trobe University (Bendigo campus)*

Dr Flower is dedicated to promoting the inclusion of neurodivergent people in the workforce.

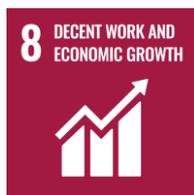
Dr Darren Hedley *Principal Research Fellow & Associate Professor, Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, La Trobe University*

Dr Hedley is the Research Director of the Health & Wellbeing research program at OTARC. Darren is a suicide prevention in autism expert whose work focuses on improving mental health, wellbeing, service access for Autistic people.

Alex Haschek *Research Communications and Impact Coordinator, Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, La Trobe University*

Alex is a research translation professional with over a decade of experience spanning education, public health, and psychology.

Relevant United Nations Sustainable Goals⁴⁴



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Note: La Trobe University researchers and submission contributors are **bolded**.

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