



**Are You Inclusive?**  
A **DARE** Initiative

# Research Report

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## 'Are You Inclusive?' project

October 2018

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Funded by the National Disability Insurance Agency

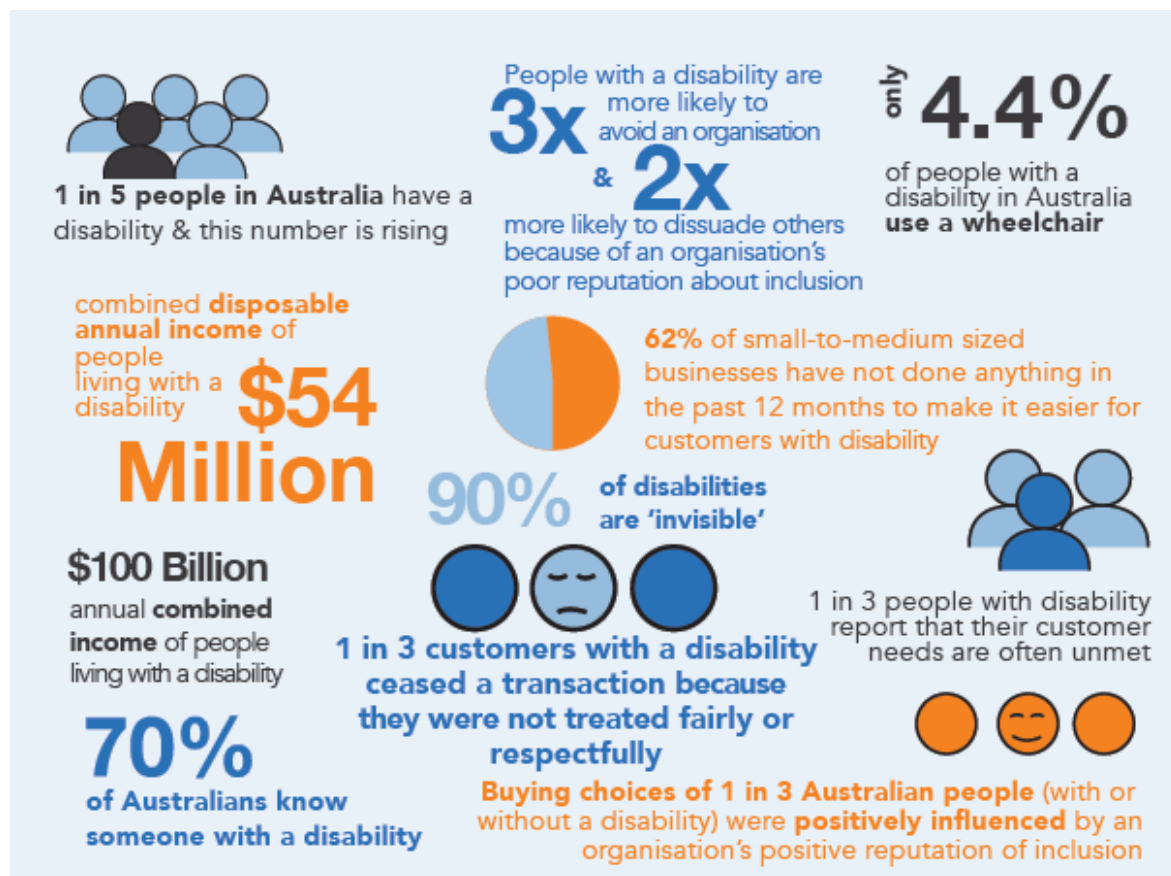


## Why are we doing this project?

People with 'invisible' disabilities like intellectual disability and autism report high levels of isolation. A major cause of this isolation is problems with independently accessing both the community and mainstream services, due to a range of factors related to appearances, behaviours, comprehension, and communication.

Current strategies, where they exist, are traditionally focused on physical access, but for people with intellectual disability and autism, it is more about customer service and feeling overwhelmed. There is little attention or information available on understanding and including people with intellectual disability or autism for businesses and services in the community.

Research has shown that Australians with disability are a significant customer group and face several challenges when using businesses (Figure 1). Unlike expensive retro-fitting of a physical environment, changes to customer service can be made easily and have a direct impact on business's profitability and positive impact on the community.



Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2016, 4430.0 - Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015; Australian Human Rights Commission 2017 'Missing out: The business case for customer diversity'; Australian Network on Disability 2017 '2017 Disability Confidence Survey'; NSW Business Chamber 2017 'Missed business: How to attract more customers through better access. A Guide for small business'; NSW business chamber 2017 'How accessible and inclusive is your Business?'.

Figure 1: Relevant statistics relating to businesses and customers with disability.

## Project goal and objectives

### Goal:

For people with intellectual disability and autism to be able to use and benefit from the same mainstream services as everyone else.

### Objectives:

1. Increase the number of businesses in the Nepean and Blue Mountains regions publically rated as intellectual disability and autism-friendly from 0 to 100 by June 2020.
2. Double the average number of local businesses used by people with intellectual disability or autism, from 7 to 14, by June 2020.

## How we collected information



### **Literature review**



### **Review of existing reports and initiatives**



### **Interviews with customers**

who have intellectual disability or autism (n=14), and their family and support workers (n=16) from the Nepean and Blue Mountains regions.



### **Interviews with organisations, businesses and services**

from various industries, including retail, transport, healthcare, entertainment, leisure, trade, and hospitality (n=12) in the Nepean and Blue Mountains regions.



### **Tag-alongs and observations**

of people with disability using local businesses / services (n=5) in the Nepean and Blue Mountains regions.

Interviews were conducted until data saturation (i.e. no new information) was obtained.

*“Don’t make us feel special, just make us feel like an individual.”* – Local resident with intellectual disability.

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## What did we find?



### Review of existing literature/initiatives

#### Academic literature:

- There are five ways that adults with invisible disability like intellectual disability or autism can feel included in their community<sup>1</sup>: 1) community participation, 2) choice and control, 3) taking on valued social roles, 4) sharing ordinary places in the community, and 5) using their gifts and abilities to contribute to the community.
- Improvement in these areas leads to better quality of life<sup>2</sup>.
- These five areas are broad and general. There is little research on how businesses and organisations can help in these areas, especially for their customers (as opposed to their employees) and for general businesses (rather than for specific health or disability services).
- An Australian study<sup>3</sup> found that businesses generally saw people with an intellectual disability as a positive to their business (mostly due to the increased profits from more customers). Customers' behaviour and appearance did not cause any problems.
- Training on how best to serve customers with disability has been shown to increase staff confidence and knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

#### Other literature:

- There are several reports available to local businesses on why and how to be inclusive to customers. These are from local councils in Sydney<sup>5</sup>, the NSW Business Chamber<sup>6</sup>, the Australian Human Rights Commission<sup>5,7</sup> and peak disability organisations, such as the Australian Network on Disability<sup>8</sup>. For these resources:
  - There is great information on what businesses across Australia have or have not done recently to become more inclusive to their customers (and why).
  - Specific advice about how to be more inclusive for customers with disability is mostly about high-level change in large organisations, or inclusion of customers with physical disability (e.g. wheelchair users) and sensory disability (e.g. low vision) in small business.
  - There is not much information about customers with intellectual disability or autism, or the things that small-to-medium organisations can do for people with all disabilities that don't require expensive changes to their buildings.
- Nationally, there are organisations currently implementing projects which aim to increase the inclusiveness of businesses for people with disability. These projects have developed very comprehensive and customised assessments for businesses, and information on how to obtain resources (at a cost) to adjust any areas which need updating<sup>9,10</sup>. There appears to be no general resource freely available (or at very low cost) for businesses on how to welcome customers with intellectual disability or autism.
- Locally, Blue Mountains City Council's 2017-2021 Disability Inclusion Action Plan<sup>11</sup> includes information on how council can assist businesses be more inclusive. This report is for all disability types, with physical accessibility and sensory disability again a big focus. A few of the proposed changes are similar to those proposed here, based on different data. This shows how strong these solutions are, and how changes to inclusiveness that aren't about physical accessibility can help all people with disability (and others), not just those with intellectual disability or autism. The 'Are You Inclusive?' project is working with the Blue Mountains City Council to create these solutions.



## Local research

- Customers with intellectual disability and autism reported that businesses and services in the Blue Mountains and Nepean regions were generally quite inclusive, but there were still several areas where improvements could be made.
- Businesses generally reported that they strived to be inclusive, but there were several areas where they would welcome help in improving their inclusiveness.
- Table 1 describes the main problems and their causes.
- Figure 2 shows the research data used to work out the problems and causes.

Table 1: Main problems and their causes, based on the data. Black circled numbers correspond to the data in Figure 2.

Problem	Cause
<b>1</b> Customers with intellectual disability or autism use a small number of businesses/services.	<b>2</b> Customers with intellectual disability or autism want to try new places but are wary of unknown businesses/services.
<b>3</b> Customers with intellectual disability or autism experience several challenges when using a business/service: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff communication: verbal</li> <li>• Business premises: lights, noise, product placement, and furniture arrangement</li> <li>• Staff communication: body language/physical actions</li> <li>• Business processes: appointments, queues</li> <li>• Crowds</li> <li>• Business resources: written communication</li> </ul>	<b>4</b> Businesses/services do not have access to staff training.  <b>5</b> Businesses /services do not advertise their inclusive options (so customers are unable to choose which business or when to visit that suits them best).  Changes are unsuitable to the business /service type or premises (out of scope).
<b>6</b> Business/service staff are unsure of how to offer help and resources.	<b>4</b> Businesses/services do not have access to staff training.
<b>7</b> Business/service staff have a limited understanding of intellectual disability and autism.	<b>4</b> Businesses/services do not have access to staff training.

*“People think of us as having to go all out, but we’re expecting to just be recognised as people and included.”*  
 – Local disability support worker



## Planning to use local businesses



## Using local businesses

Customers



Businesses



### 1 Only use a small number of businesses

No. of businesses used by customers with intellectual disability or autism, on average	Total no. of businesses in Nepean & Blue Mtns
7	18,872

Source: customer interviews

### 2 Want to try new places but are wary of unknown businesses



86%

of customers with disability, and their support people, are keen to try new businesses, if they know the business has received inclusiveness training.

Source: customer interviews and observations

### 4 Do not have access to staff training



Only **1 business** of those consulted trained their staff specifically on intellectual disability or autism (and this was based on their own personal experience with disability).

Source: business interviews

### 5 Do not advertise their inclusive options

There is **no central resource** to recognise an inclusive business.

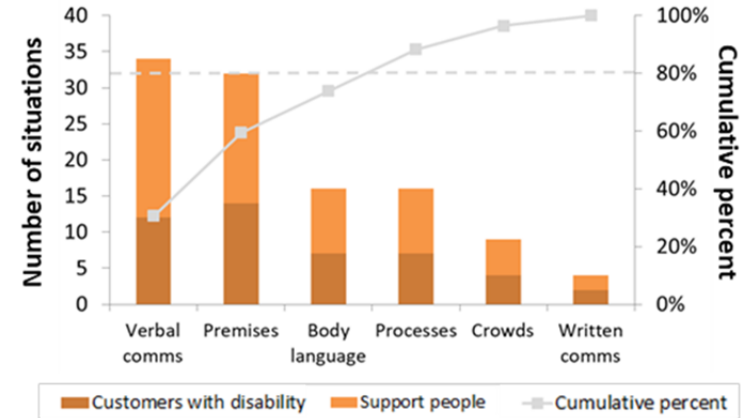


100%

of businesses consulted would welcome a way to recognise their inclusiveness.

Source: business interviews

### 3 Experience several challenges when using a business



Source: customer interviews and observations

### 6 Are unsure of how to offer help and resources



78%

of business staff wanted to be inclusive, but weren't sure how to offer help to someone with disability respectfully.

Source: business interviews

The biggest challenge to communication involved the customer being **avoided or ignored** (32% of situations).

Source: customer interviews and observations

### 7 Have a limited understanding of intellectual disability or autism

48%

of challenges people with intellectual disability or autism reported for communicating with staff involved a misunderstanding of the customer's ability (20%) or behaviour (28%).

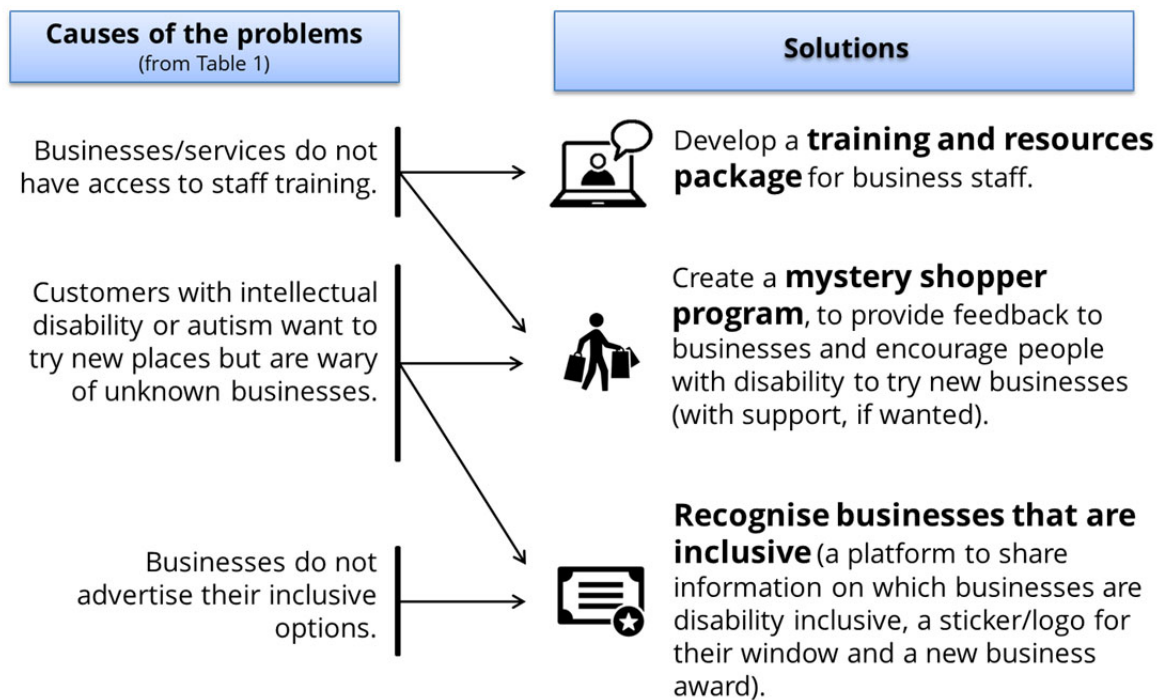
Source: customer interviews and observations

Challenges to communication



Figure 2: Research data used to work out the problems and their causes. Black circled numbers correspond those in Table 1.

## What can we do about it?



## Next steps



*“As a business manager, it’s going to get my business out there and get more customers, and as a mum of someone with a disability, it would be fantastic!”*

*–Local resident*

## What is the impact?

The resources developed by this project will create several short- and long-term benefits to our community.

### Improve the lives of people with intellectual disability and autism

Customers with disabilities like intellectual disability or autism will be able to:

- Feel less isolated.
- Identify and use local businesses and services freely, confidently and like any other community member.
- Have more options to choose the products and services they require, without being limited by the businesses and services they feel comfortable using.
- Have more positive experiences when using businesses and services.
- Know they are a welcome and valued member of the community.
- Have more opportunity and confidence to participate in community life.
- Have more choice in their lives, including the option to shop locally.
- Enjoy more variety in their daily activities.

### Benefit local businesses and services

Local businesses and services will:

- Increase their base of new and loyal customers – not only of people with intellectual disability and autism, but also their friends, family and support workers.
- Be recognised for their positive inclusiveness of diversity in the community.
- Have another reason why it's great to shop locally.
- Increase their social capital.
- Be part of positive change in the community.
- Receive free staff training.
- Have the benefits extend to other customers, such as people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and older people.
- Collectively boost the economic profile of the community.
- Help establish the region as an appealing location for the booming accessible-tourism market.

### Help the general community

Other community members will benefit from:

- Seeing more people with intellectual disability and autism out in the community, which improves awareness and understanding and reduces stigma.
- The knowledge that their local community cares for its community members.
- Noticing a positive change in the community.
- Having more options of businesses and services to use when they are out with their friends and family who have an intellectual disability or autism.



## For more information



[areyouinclusive.com.au](http://areyouinclusive.com.au)



[/areyouinclusive](https://www.facebook.com/areyouinclusive)

## References

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- <sup>9</sup> Scope Australia (n.d.) Communication Access, [www.scopeaust.org.au/service/communication-access/](http://www.scopeaust.org.au/service/communication-access/)
- <sup>10</sup> City of Greater Bendigo (n.d.) Inclusive Towns Guide for Businesses. [www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/FINAL%20Inclusive%20Towns%20booklet.pdf](http://www.bendigo.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-08/FINAL%20Inclusive%20Towns%20booklet.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) 2017, Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2017-2021. [www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/files/DisabilityInclusionActionPlan2017-2021.pdf](http://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/files/DisabilityInclusionActionPlan2017-2021.pdf)