

CASE FOR ACTION

Creating truly inclusive workplaces, together.



**Autistic people are part of every community –
and increasingly, every organisation.**

An estimated 1 in 40 Australians are Autistic¹ and up to 1 in 5 people globally are neurodivergent – a term that refers to natural variations in how individuals think, learn, and process information, including conditions such as Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other neurological differences².

Together
we create inclusive,
autism-friendly
organisations that
work for everyone.

Why autism-friendly organisations matter



1. The employment gap is clear

Despite their skills, experience, and motivation, Autistic Australians continue to face significant barriers to employment:

- The unemployment rate for Autistic people is 18.2%, more than double that of people with disability and nearly six times the rate of the general population³.
- Many are also underemployed, working in roles below their skill level or capacity. Among those employed, 45% report being over-skilled for their current role, and more than half want to work more hours⁴.

This highlights the urgent need for autism-friendly organisations that actively remove barriers and create environments where autistic employees can thrive and contribute meaningfully.

"I've worked in many industries... and I'd last maybe six months to a year. Not because I couldn't do the job, but because I was terrified of asking questions. I thought if I asked for help, people would think I was stupid. So I'd just leave."

— AUTISTIC PROFESSIONAL

2. Inclusive organisations perform better

Organisations that lead on disability inclusion are not just doing the right thing, they're also seeing measurable business benefits compared to those not prioritising disability inclusion.

- 1.6 times higher revenue
- 2.6 times higher net income
- 2 times more economic profit
- 25% higher productivity (measured as revenue per employee)
- Twice as many positive reviews related to disability inclusion on platforms like Glassdoor⁵

These outcomes reflect what's possible when workplaces are designed to include, support, and value all employees.

"Whilst we can't change an Autistic person, we can change their environment to better support their needs. And accommodations don't just benefit Autistic people. They benefit the entire community."

— GRACE TAME, AUTISTIC, RUNNER, ACTIVIST & 2021 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

3. The workforce is changing

Over the last decade, the number of people diagnosed, or identifying, as autistic have increased significantly. More Autistic people are entering the workforce, and more employees are identifying as neurodivergent or parenting neurodivergent children.

This shift is already influencing:

- Your employees, with growing expectations for inclusive policies and support
- Your customers, who increasingly expect accessible, inclusive services and communication

Organisations that respond proactively are better placed to meet these expectations and build trust.

4. Australians expect action

Public attitudes are clear:

- 84% believe Autistic people face discrimination
- 75% acknowledge Autistic people struggle to find work
- 70% believe employers should make adjustments
- 1 in 4 expect training to be provided if a colleague is Autistic⁶

Inclusion is no longer a compliance issue. It's a matter of social responsibility and leadership.

5. Economic inclusion is a national priority

The Australian National Autism Strategy (2025–2031)⁷ identifies economic inclusion as a key outcome, recognising that access to meaningful work is central to wellbeing, independence, and participation for Autistic individuals.

Right now, 45% of Autistic people live near or in poverty, largely due to unemployment and underemployment⁸. Increasing employment of people with disability by just 10% could boost Australia's economy by \$16 billion a year (not including savings in welfare and health costs)⁹.

What's getting in the way?



Despite growing awareness, Autistic individuals continue to face persistent barriers to equitable employment. These barriers are not about capability, they stem from systems, structures, and attitudes that exclude.

Employer understanding and confidence

Many employers want to be inclusive but lack the confidence, clarity, and understanding to act. Nearly one-third of Autistic Australians identified a lack of employer understanding as a direct barrier to employment¹⁰. The Australian Network on Disability found that the biggest barrier to implementing disability employment initiatives is managers lacking confidence and expertise to support neurodivergent employees¹¹.

Traditional hiring practices

Traditional recruitment methods aren't designed to include Autistic (and neurodivergent) individuals. Autistic candidates are often disadvantaged by:

- Vague job descriptions
- Interviews that focus heavily on social interactions
- Lack of practical approaches that support demonstrating the candidates' skills and abilities¹².

Stigma

Stigma refers to the negative stereotypes and social judgments directed at people who are perceived as different and it remains a major barrier for Autistic individuals in the workplace. Many Autistic employees choose not to disclose their diagnosis for fear of being misunderstood, excluded, or seen as less capable.

This fear is well-founded. A systematic review found that while disclosure can lead to greater inclusion and access to support, it also often results in discrimination or social distancing¹³. As a result, many Autistic people feel pressure to mask which can be exhausting and unsustainable, and ultimately contributes to higher rates of unemployment and underemployment.

Unmet needs and misunderstandings

Autistic employees often leave their roles not because of poor performance, but because their communication and social needs are misunderstood or not accommodated.

Behaviours such as avoiding eye contact, taking longer to respond, using a flat tone, or preferring limited social interaction are often misread as disengagement. In reality, they reflect different, but equally valid, ways of connecting.

The double empathy problem¹⁴ highlights that communication breakdowns often arise from mutual misunderstanding between Autistic and non-autistic people, not from a deficit within Autistic individuals.

Supporting retention means recognising these differences not as deficits, but as part of the diversity of human experience and designing organisations that accommodate and value them.

Incorrect assumptions about the cost of inclusion

Many people assume that supporting Autistic employees is costly or complicated. In fact, most workplace adjustments are low or no cost like sensory and communication supports and flexible routines. Research also shows there's no significant difference in employment costs for Autistic employees compared to others¹⁵. Inclusion doesn't require major investment, just thoughtful design and flexibility.

Few Autistic role models in leadership

Autistic adults are still underrepresented both across media and in organisations. This lack of visibility reinforces stereotypes that limit employment and career development. Autistic individuals often feel invisible in adult life, with fewer resources and less representation compared to children¹⁶. Without role models, it's harder to challenge assumptions and build employment pathways.

Outdated stereotypes and misconceptions

Stereotypes about autism shape harmful attitudes. These can include Autistic people:

- lack social skills
- struggle with communication
- have low intellectual ability
- are only suited to technical or IT roles

These misconceptions also include portrayals of Autistic people as savants or having superpowers, reinforcing narrow and inaccurate views of what it means to be Autistic¹⁷.

Such stereotypes ignore the diversity of Autistic experience and can lead to exclusion when individuals don't fit these limited, and incorrect, expectations

*"We're not broken,
we're just wired a bit
differently. That doesn't mean
we can't do the job, it just means we
might do it in our own way. You might
find someone who brings a lot to the
table, in ways you didn't expect.
I'm proof of that."*

— MICHAEL THEO, AUTISM CONSULTANT,
ACTOR AND VOICE-OVER ARTIST



1. Trusted experience

With 60 years of experience and 8 years dedicated to creating autism-friendly environments, Aspect Autism Friendly is Australia's leader in accessibility and inclusion.

2. Authentic collaboration

Our services are informed and delivered by Autistic professionals, ensuring authenticity and lived experience.

3. Proven impact

We have worked with major organisations including Sydney Airport, Disney, and the Melbourne Cricket Ground to create meaningful change.

4. Comprehensive and practical support

Our approach is grounded in research and evidence-informed best practices, designed to provide clear, actionable steps that drive meaningful results and lasting change.

5. Better for everyone

Although developed to support Autistic employees, our practices enhance the overall employee experience, improving wellbeing and engagement across the entire organisation.

Inclusion isn't a position, it's a continual practice

Creating inclusive, autism-friendly organisations isn't about quick fixes – it requires sustained commitment. It means embedding inclusive practices, valuing lived experience, and continuously evolving to meet diverse needs.

Together, we can build workplaces that not only support Autistic employees but create better experiences for everyone.

Find out how Aspect Autism Friendly Employment can support your organisation. Contact us today:
autismfriendly@aspect.org.au

"As an Autistic/aspie person, I thrive in workplaces that understand and support me. When that's missing, it's easy to feel left out. Inclusion isn't a one time thing – it's about listening, learning, and improving together."

– ALEXANDRA ROBINSON,
ASPECT EMPLOYEE

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