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Disability and Screen Work in Australia

Summary Report

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Supported by Melbourne Disability Institute and A2K Media

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Acknowledgements

We pay respects to the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung Peoples of the Kulin Alliance as Traditional Owners of the lands on which researchers conducted this work. We particularly thank First Nations people who shared their experiences with us. In the course of this research, we communicated with hundreds of people around Australia, living on the lands of various First Nations Peoples. We pay respects to First Nations Peoples and Elders as custodians of their lands, waters, skies, communities, stories and cultures. Sovereignty was never ceded.

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Research Team

Dr. Radha O'Meara, Chief Investigator; Dr Laura Dunstan, Survey and Data Specialist; Phoebe Neilson, Training and Development Manager, A2K Media; Anna Debinski, Research Assistant; Catherine Ryan, Research Assistant.

Images

Photos courtesy of A2K Media (Cover and p6), Renata Dominik, Latecomers and SBS (p4).

Cover image shows Ade Djajamihardja, an Asian Australian man using a wheelchair, who speaks directly to camera. He's in a lounge room surrounded by lights, reflectors and microphones.

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This report is also available in other versions online:

This includes a more detailed PDF, a Microsoft Word document optimised for screen readers and an Easy Read summary.

<https://disability.unimelb.edu.au/home/projects/community-based-research-program/disability-justice-lens>

“Not only do people deserve to see themselves shown authentically on TV, they deserve to participate in the production and have their voices heard and seen.

- Disabled person in finance and funding, age ~50s, man

Introduction

Disability is a key vector of inequality in Australian society. The screen industry has the potential to create meaningful change, in our workplaces and working practices, for our colleagues and our audiences. We need to pay more attention to disability and take more action to include disabled people in our industry.

Experience of disability is widespread in Australian society. Nearly 1 in 5 people live with disability (AIHW). Disability should be commonly discussed and accommodated within the screen industry. Without efforts to create this change, the screen industry will continue to drain talent and entrench disadvantage.

Disabled people working in the screen industry have diverse impairments, conditions, and access requirements. Despite this diversity, many disabled workers share common experiences of stigma, exclusion and discrimination. This is because ableism is built into the structures of our society and our industry, from how we talk about disability every day to how we design schedules.

Disabled people experience a more precarious, lower paid, and less powerful position in the screen industry than their non-disabled counterparts. Disabled screen workers routinely experience prejudice.

These experiences suggest structural problems across the screen industry and its culture. They reflect a lack of understanding of disability and a reliance on negative stereotypes of disabled workers. Interviewees commonly noted that they experienced more diverse and inclusive work cultures in other industries.

Overwhelmingly, survey respondents called for greater awareness and understanding. Attitudes and inflexibility were repeatedly identified as key barriers. This means that the first steps towards change should be focused on people and everyday practices. Disability equity, inclusion and accessibility training tailored to the screen industry can make a significant impact.

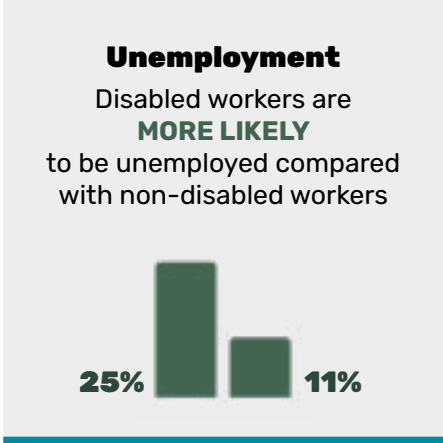
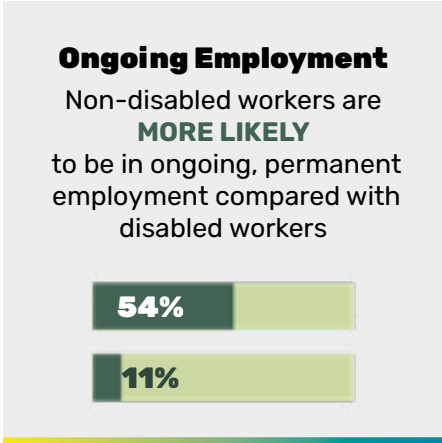
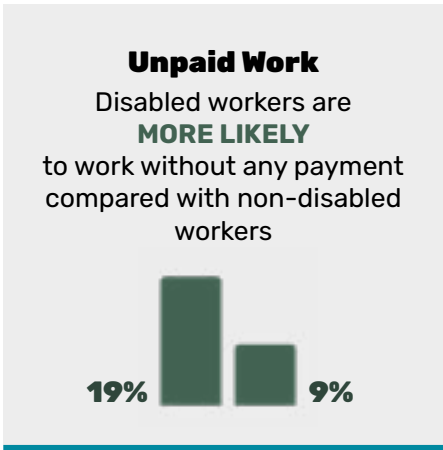
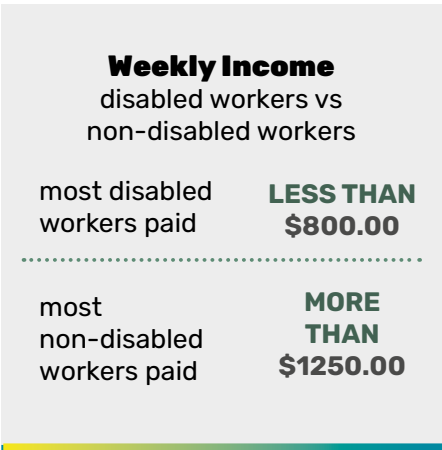
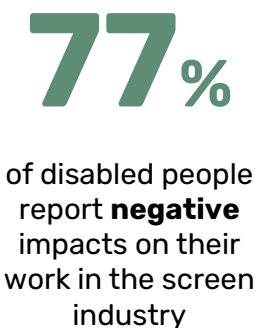
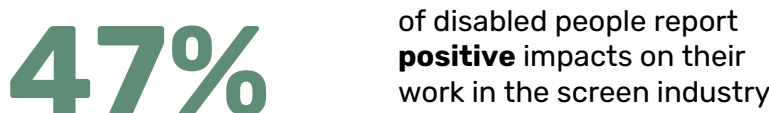
Consultation, innovation and funding can transform industrial structures to create a more inclusive and sustainable industry for all screen workers. We must normalise talking about and providing access requirements to support disabled workers.

The findings of this research reflect the need to build greater understanding, transparency and accountability in order to fully include disabled workers in the Australian screen industry.

Image description: Cast and crew work on a jetty, shooting Latecomers for SBS. In the foreground, three crew members hold a microphone and camera, while focused on the cast. In the background, the one cast member pushes another in a wheelchair.



Quick Facts



Disabled workers suggest these improvements would have the greatest impact:

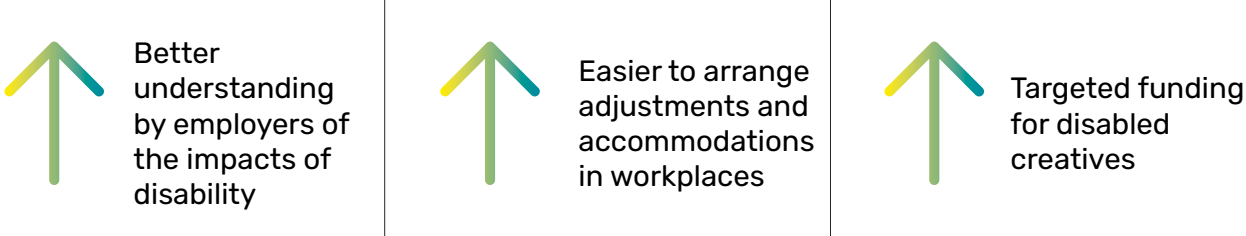




Image description: Senator Jordan Steele-John uses a wheelchair on a footpath. He reaches his hands up and looks up towards a camera. In front of him on the footpath, a camerawoman stands on a blue ladder and points her camera down at Steele-John. A man holds the ladder steady and someone swings a boom microphone.

Key findings

1. Disabled people contribute significantly to the industry across a wide variety of roles and on a wide range of content
2. Contributions by disabled people to the Australian screen industry should be better recognised and supported
3. The diversity of disabled people should be recognised in the screen industry
4. Disabled people should be recognised in the screen industry as experts on their own capabilities and access requirements
5. Disability can make our screen work better
6. Disabled people enhance the screen industry
7. Disabled people experience a more precarious, lower paid, and less powerful position in the screen industry than their non-disabled counterparts
8. Disabled workers routinely face prejudice in the screen industry
9. Disabled and non-disabled screen workers have very different perceptions of how disabled people are treated
10. Disabled people find talking about their disability status at work is often dangerous and stressful
11. Disabled screen workers want employers to talk about accessibility
12. Disabled workers find it difficult to access the screen industry
13. Some disabled people are excluded from the screen industry
14. The screen industry should be more accessible for everyone
15. Disabled people find the screen industry particularly inflexible
16. The screen industry needs to be more flexible
17. The screen industry needs widespread change

Recommendations for the Australian screen industry to improve participation and inclusion of disabled workers

Training

- Encourage widespread participation in disability equity, accessibility and inclusion training to foster greater awareness and understanding at every level throughout the screen industry.
- Promote ongoing training to support continuous improvement.

Accessibility

- Normalise discussing and implementing access requirements to support all workers across the screen industry.
- Encourage widespread use of Disability Action Plans (DAPs) to formalise lines of communication, resourcing and responsibility.
- Implement new standards in government agencies for budgeting and reporting that incentivise the use of DAPs.
- Make festivals, conferences and networking events accessible.

Consultation

- Formalise processes for regular dialogue between disabled screen workers, disabled-led organisations, government agencies, guilds and associations.
- Measure employment participation and inclusion, and evaluate effectiveness of new practices.

Innovation

- Embrace greater creativity and flexibility in standard industry practices, from recruitment and job-sharing to communication and scheduling.
- Recognise that implementing innovative working practices can be cost-neutral or improve cost-effectiveness.
- Recognise that accommodating disabled workers increases equity, inclusion and sustainability for all workers.

Government funding

- Target funding for disabled key creatives to prioritise storytelling by and about disabled people.
- Target funding to recognise and support sustainable careers for disabled workers.
- Allocate money for access requirements on all government-funded projects.
- Revise all funding streams to ensure they recognise and support diverse career trajectories.



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Conclusion

This report focuses the attention of the Australian screen industry on disability for the first time. The key findings describe how we create social inequity and exclusion through everyday actions and common attitudes. Voices of respondents and interviewees illustrate the detail and devastation of systemic discrimination faced by our disabled colleagues. This report also points to essential solutions that will improve the way we work and the content we produce.

This research is consistent with what we know about ableism in similar creative industries and in screen industries in countries with similar cultures. However, countries like the United Kingdom and Canada already have initiatives specifically targeted to address ableism in their screen industries. Previously, we had very little evidence of how disability was experienced and treated in the Australian screen industry; now that we have the evidence, it is essential that we address the systemic and everyday inequities and prejudices.

To create this change, we need widespread and targeted action across training, consultation, innovation, policy and funding. This requires clear leadership and close, ongoing engagement with disabled people. This research finds undeniable evidence of the need for change, but also willingness to learn, understand and act to make the workforce more inclusive and accessible.

Future research will be crucial to help the screen industry understand how attitudes to and experiences of disability persist or change. It would be particularly valuable to capture the experiences of disabled people who have been entirely excluded from the Australian screen industry, in order to gain greater insight into how this happens and how it can be rectified. More detailed data and analysis of intersectional experiences of disability would provide more insight into how screen workers are marginalised and how this can be addressed. In particular, researchers must endeavour to collect more survey responses from non-white people, who form a large

proportion of the Australian population, but are not well represented in this research or the screen industry. Greater efforts to implement accessibility and inclusivity in research design will deliver more effective and meaningful results.

Diversity is a key issue across global screen industries. Screen stories are an important way that we understand the experiences of different people and conceive of our community. Audiences at home and around the world seek diverse and authentic screen stories. Yet disabled people are being left behind, particularly in the Australian context. Discrimination within the screen industry echoes and reinforces the prejudice disabled people encounter across society. Failing to support the participation and inclusion of disabled people threatens the screen industry's capacity to create authentic and compelling screen stories.

Disabled people belong in the Australian screen industry. Our participation is essential, our stories are vital, and our work can contribute significantly to the growing economic, social and cultural power of the Australian screen industry.

“We’re bringing a perspective to the table that opens your production up to maybe new audiences; different ways of creative problem solving, different ways of working.”

- Disabled Producer and Editor
age ~30s, woman





<https://go.unimelb.edu.au/98te>