Disability Inclusion

This resource aims to raise awareness of disability. It provides an understanding of support available to Australia Awards scholars, and how to create an inclusive environment and support those who experience disability.

What is a disability?

In medical terms, a disability is described as any condition that restricts or impairs a person's mental, sensory or mobility functions and may affect their full and effective participation in society.

The social model of disability encourages us to consider 'disability' as the result of the interaction of people living with such impairments and an environment that is filled with structural, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. Disability is created by the level and type of societal barriers that prevent fair and equal participation and contribution by the individual. An example of this is access to a building: if there are stairs, but no ramp or elevator, this creates a structural barrier for a wheelchair user.

Disability comes in many types and forms, and can be the result of illness or genetic disorders, trauma, or accidents. A disability may affect mobility, the ability to learn, or the ability to communicate easily. Some people may have more than one disability. A disability may be visible or hidden, be temporary or permanent, and have a varying impact on a person's abilities. Some people are born with a disability, but many may have spent much of their life without one.

It is estimated that one billion people worldwide—or approximately 15% of the world's population—experience some form of disability. Disability has a higher prevalence in economically poorer countries, and people with disability and their families are more likely to experience poverty and hardship.

Disability in Australia

More than 4 million people in Australia have some form of disability: approximately 1 in 5 people. Like people in other countries,

Australians with disability and their families experience higher levels of discrimination, barriers to participation and disadvantage.

Australia's national, state and territory, and local governments are committed to supporting people with disability to participate as equal and equitable citizens in Australian society. The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability, and provides legislation that ensures that all people with disability have fair access to and benefit from services, including employment, healthcare, education, transport, housing, and public facilities and buildings.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

The UNCRPD is an international human rights treaty that aims to protect the rights of people with disability and enhance their opportunities to participate in all aspects of life.

The Australian Government ratified the UNCRPD in 2008. By doing so, Australia accepts the obligation to recognise that people with disability legally enjoy the same rights as all Australians.

More information on the UNCRPD and the eight guiding principles can be found in the resources section of this document.

Disability support from universities and institutions

Australia Awards promotes the inclusion and successful participation of people with disability. People with disability, who meet the selection criteria, are actively encouraged to apply.

In order to provide support and ensure that proper adjustments are made for scholarship recipients with disability, it is important that any disabilities are disclosed during the application process. All applications are assessed fairly and equally, and applicants will not be excluded on the grounds of disability.

Universities in Australia have a variety of support services available for students, and it is unlawful for universities to discriminate against students with disability.

Each university in Australia has a dedicated Student Contact Officer who is responsible for facilitating the on-campus support services for Australia Awards scholars, including those with disability. The Student Contact Officer will introduce scholars with disability to the institution's disability support services and help ensure that the necessary adjustments are correctly implemented.

Promoting a disability inclusive environment

It's important to think about what can be done to support and promote an inclusive environment. There are a few key simple pointers that can help us all to be stronger advocates and take action to promote and protect the rights of people with disability and enhance their fair and equal participation and inclusion. Keep the following in mind:

- Disability is created by barriers in the environment and not the person who has an impairment.
- Focus on the person, not the impairment—people with disability are individuals who have the same diversity of emotions, feelings, aspirations, fears and concerns that all people do. Don't assume that they are 'super-human', 'victims' or suffering because they experience disability.
- Ask people with disability whether they need assistance and don't assume that they need help. Always check the best and safest way that you can assist if it is needed.
- Think about potential barriers and plan how to avoid or minimise them. For example, when suggesting a meeting place or planning a social event, think about the accessibility of the venue and transport arrangements.
- Use appropriate language that puts the person first, and avoid use of terms that describe suffering, limitations or weakness. Check with the person themselves what words and descriptions they would prefer to use when talking about their disability.

To summarise: think about changing the focus from disability to accessibility. Rather than excluding or singling out a person if they have a disability, think about how to improve the environment to make it more inclusive, accessible and equitable.

Resources and further support

Department of Social Services' Disability and Carers page
www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade: Development for All 2015–2020
www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/ Pages/development-for-all-2015-2020.aspx

Australian Network on Disability
www.and.org.au

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/ convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html

International Day of People with Disability
www.idpwd.com.au

National Disability Services
www.nds.org.au

Australian Disability Development Consortium
www.addc.org.au

For personalised or further information regarding disability support through each university or institution, it is recommended that scholars consult with their Student Contact Officer.