

Ph 1800 033 660 | E bca@bca.org.au | W [bca.org.au](https://www.bca.org.au/) | ABN 90 006 985 226

# Embracing Flexibility – The Benefits of Increasing Employment for People with Disability

The idea that increasing the diversity of a workplace can have widely positive impacts on the business and its employees is not a new one – almost a decade worth of studies has shown hiring people with disability to be a smart business decision. Benefits like lower staff turnover, increased productivity, positive attitude, and increased morale have all been reported throughout various studies.

However, many employers continue to have outdated perceptions of hiring people with disability. People with disability between the ages of 15-64 have a labour force participation rate of 53.4% - a number which has remained relatively stagnant over the last 20 years. In comparison, people of the same age who do not have a disability have experienced significant increases in labour force participation resulting in a current rate of 84.1%.

Blind Citizens Australia’s ‘[An Eye to the Future](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/)’ project focuses on increasing employment opportunities for people who are blind or vision impaired by educating employers and breaking down the stigma around hiring people with disability through resources, webinars, and events such as their [Employment Symposium,](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/employers/upcoming-events/employment-symposium/) being held in October.

A key aspect of BCA’s An Eye to the Future project is the [Internship Program](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/internship/), which matches potential interns with host employers for a full-time, paid internship at their organisation. BCA provides ongoing support to interns and employers throughout the duration of the internship, as well as during the recruitment and hiring process.

One of the companies participating in the latest round of internships is [Neuron](https://www.rideneuron.com/), a rapidly growing, global e-scooter and e-bike service. Neuron is currently hosting a Communications and CRM intern, Vanessa (Ness) Vlajkovic, who is based in Perth.

Ness is deafblind and has a Bachelor of Media and Communications from Edith Cowan University, and a Masters of Writing, Editing and Publishing from the University of Queensland. Outside of work, Ness loves playing sport and is a competitive dancer and powerlifter.

“Finding consistent employment has been a real nightmare. I went to Uni immediately after high school and studied for 3.5 years in media and communications. I then followed this up with a master’s degree in writing, editing, and publishing. Despite these qualifications, trying to gain work has been very difficult,” said Ness.

“Most employers don't bother even giving me an interview after they see on my resume that I am deafblind. Generally speaking, people assume there is nothing I can do that would be of use to their organisation and therefore never give me a chance.”

Ness is currently undertaking a 6-month internship after a successful match with Neuron through BCA’s An Eye to the Future project.

“We believe it is important to lead by example, and show organisations like ours that there should not be barriers to providing employment opportunities to someone with a disability. In Ness's case her disability has not held her back, she has been able to use her qualifications and skillset to have a positive and meaningful impact at Neuron," said Richard Hannah, Head of ANZ – Neuron Mobility

“The best part for me has been the flexibility and understanding of my team. Everyone is very respectful and supportive which is a breath of fresh air for me. My manager and other people I have ‘virtually’ met are always happy to accommodate my accessibility needs, something I truly appreciate…So, I am very grateful for this kind of work environment. On top of that, I have found the actual work itself to be a great fit for my abilities, as it allows me to showcase my true potential in communications,” said Ness.

Changes in how we work have also made it easier for people who are blind or vision impaired to find employment that works for them.

“I believe the shift to more people working from home will provide greater employment opportunities for people like myself. Personally, I actually prefer working in an office. I find I can build a better connection with my colleagues... However, with more people working from home it does remove a perceived barrier for potential employers to hire someone who has a disability, like myself.”, said Ness.

In the past two years, workplaces have experienced a massive shift away from traditional work cultures, and have embraced flexible, remote, and hybrid work. This newfound flexibility of work has been widely adopted and has reportedly had positive impacts on staff wellbeing, productivity, and retention.

The normalisation of flexible and remote work has the potential to have positive impacts on the employment opportunities available to people who are blind or vision impaired, and people with disability generally.

As a fully remote workplace, even prior to COVID-times, BCA is well acquainted with the benefits that flexible work arrangements can have for people who are blind or vision impaired.

“As a national organisation, it’s important for us to have a staff presence across the country. The majority of our staff are blind or vision impaired or have disability. Remote work allows us to ensure a fully-accessible and well-connected workplace.”, said Sally Aurisch, CEO – Blind Citizens Australia.

Now that remote and hybrid work is widely accepted and integrated in most workplaces, the groundwork to implement these flexible work arrangements when hiring people with disability already exists. It’s time to capitalise on these shifts in our workplace cultures to drive the opportunities available to people with disability.

To create meaningful changes to the employment landscape for people with disability, we need to tackle the stigma that exists around hiring people with disability.

Firstly, many employers believe that there are costs associated with hiring people with disability. This is untrue. JobAccess, a government funded resource, covers the cost of any workplace adjustments an employee needs, including, but not limited to, assistive technology requirements. Further, the reduced staff turn-over rate can reduce training and recruiting costs long-term.

Secondly, many employers think that people with disability are likely to take more sick leave and report more workplace health and safety incidents – both of which are untrue.

BCA’s An Eye to the Future project specialises in breaking down these myths and provides employers with the resources and support they need to increase the accessibility and inclusivity of their workplaces.

The [Employment Symposium](https://eyetothefuture.com.au/employers/upcoming-events/employment-symposium/) is a key example of the work that BCA does to educate businesses about hiring people who are blind or vision impaired. The Symposium will feature keynote speaker Graeme Innes AM and several sessions to help employers develop a better understanding of how to enhance organisational diversity and inclusion.

The Symposium is also an opportunity to hear from employers and managers about their experiences hiring and working with staff who are blind or vision impaired.

This one-day event will be held in Sydney on the 10th October starting at 9:00am. It is fully catered and free for all participants. [registration is available here](https://events.humanitix.com/symposium).

## Media Contact

For more information/interviews please contact:

Adriana Malavisi
Blind Citizens Australia
Phone: 0499 079337
Email: media@bca.org.au

## Background Info

### About Blind Citizens Australia

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is the national organisation of people who are blind or vision impaired and is recognised as the major peak representative body for this constituency. Since 1975, BCA has provided information, peer support, individual and systemic advocacy, and consultancy services to its members and the wider community.

BCA Branches act as local representative groups and provide opportunities for social interaction for members. It has grown to an organisation of 3000 individual members and seven affiliated organisations.

Our mission is to inform, connect, and empower Australians who are blind or vision impaired and the broader community.

With over 45 years of history, BCA has worked tirelessly “To Change What it Means to be Blind” both for Australians who experience vision loss and for blind and vision impaired people throughout the world.

Specifically, this has included:

* providing peer support
* providing individual and systemic advocacy
* facilitating information exchange
* empowering its members
* promoting positive community attitudes
* striving for high quality and accessible services which meet individual needs
* promoting research into the causes and amelioration of the impact of blindness and vision impairment

As the national voice of people who are blind or vision impaired BCA has a seat on many Government, commercial and community sector advisory bodies. BCA’s individual advocacy service is available to all Australians who experience vision loss. With a focus on issues that impact on the individual because of their blindness/vision impairment, BCA works both directly and through specialist community advocates, to resolve issues in a constructive and educative manner and draws on more formal processes where a mutually agreeable solution cannot be found.

BCA has been an active member of the World Blind Union at both the World and Regional levels since its creation in 1984. Over that period two of the senior members have held office as World President and several more have served on the World and Regional Executives and various standing committees. In November 2000 BCA was the lead organisation for the hosting in Melbourne of the WBU 5th General Assembly. BCA has also lead capacity building projects in Fiji and Vietnam and has participated in many international conferences and forums.

In association with its policy development and advocacy work, BCA has undertaken a range of blindness related research projects. Several of these resulted in published papers.

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### About Neuron Mobility

Neuron, Australia and New Zealand’s leading e-scooter operator, differentiates by being the best partner to cities while also leading the industry when it comes to safety and sustainable operations. Founded in 2016, the company has introduced an impressive number of industry world firsts and pioneering innovations including e-scooter battery swapping, geofencing control and integrated helmets. Neuron operates in 16 cities in Australia and New Zealand including Sydney, Brisbane, Darwin, Adelaide, Canberra, Townsville, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Hobart, Launceston, Ballarat, Melbourne, Perth, Auckland, Dunedin and Christchurch. The company also launched in the United Kingdom in 2020, and Canada in 2021.

For more information, visit: <https://www.rideneuron.com>.