# National Employment Research Survey Report

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## Introduction

According to the Australian bureau of Statistics, the standard unemployment rate (reported as at May 2018), was 5.5%. It therefore seems timely to re-examine whether these relatively low levels of unemployment have translated into correspondingly higher levels of employment for people who are blind or have low vision. In 2007, 2012 and 2018, Vision Australia undertook research on the issues facing people who are blind or have low vision in seeking employment, keeping a job and progressing in their careers. This 2018 report will continue the previous analysis by updating findings from the 2007 and 2012 reports. Where possible, comparisons will be drawn between data gathered in this most recent study, and the previous research that was undertaken.

## Key Findings

* Under a third (27%) of respondents who are employed would like to work more hours. This has decreased from 33% in 2012, potentially indicating a downward trend in the issue of underemployment for people who are blind or have low vision.
* 49% of survey respondents are currently employed. Of those, 73% are working more than 20 hours per week.
* Over half of those who are currently working are employed in the not for profit and private sectors. Community or disability services was the industry that employed the greatest number of people who are blind or have low vision, accounting for 17% of survey respondents who are currently employed. This is not dissimilar to the results of the 2012 survey, which revealed that 18% of people who are blind or have low vision were employed in the community services and disability sector.
* Over half of those who disclosed that they have a secondary disability said that blindness or low vision impacts their life more than their other disability.
* Only 16% of those surveyed identified that they use Braille.
* 56% of those surveyed said that they have never used Vision Australia’s employment services.
* 59% of those surveyed were either satisfied, or very satisfied in their current role. This compares to 82% of respondents in 2012, indicating a significant decrease in job satisfaction. For the majority of respondents, their level of job satisfaction seemed to be directly linked to whether they had opportunities to utilise their skills and qualifications and whether they felt valued, respected and supported in the workplace.
* 63% of respondents said they had encountered barriers or discrimination in the workplace, and 53% had experienced this while job seeking, however, 80% of survey respondents said they had never used Vision Australia’s advocacy services to assist them in resolving these issues.
* Only a third of those surveyed had received mentoring relevant to their current job, and only 14% of respondents had participated in a formal mentoring program at work.
* Negative employer attitudes toward people with disability, ability to get to a workplace and the difficulty of finding work environments that meet the needs of people who are blind or have low vision, were the top three significant barrier to gaining and maintaining employment. Conversely, skills and qualifications, confidence in using assistive technology, and lack of work experience were not regarded as barriers by the majority of participants.
* Support with job placement, coaching and mentoring, and work experience, were the top three employment services nominated by respondents as being of greatest value to them.

## Survey Results

### Methodology

The 2018 employment survey was hosted on Vision Australia’s digital engagement platform, Participate. As well as having the option to complete the survey online, participants were able to provide their responses via telephone, with the assistance of staff in Vision Australia’s national contact centre. The aim of this was to ensure that the feedback obtained was representative of the overall client population to the greatest degree possible.

Invitations to complete the survey were circulated via direct email to 10,868 clients of Vision Australia aged over 18. The tracking data available reveals that:

* 37.83% of recipients who received the email subsequently opened it; (this compares to recently reported open rates for email marketing in the not-for-profit sector of 24%); and
* 13% of those who opened the email clicked a link to look at the survey (this compares to recently reported click rates for email marketing in the not-for-profit sector of 2.57%).

This would indicate that Vision Australia’s levels of engagement with clients are relatively high. Information about the survey and details on how to complete it were also circulated via social media, Vision Australia newsletters, community mailing lists and via community service announcements on Vision Australia radio.

### Number of Respondents

The survey was completed by a total of 360 respondents. While we believe that this is a sufficient representation of Vision Australia’s client population, we acknowledge that the sample may only partially reflect the blind and low vision community more broadly, due to the challenges associated with obtaining the views of non-clients.

### Respondent Demographics

#### Age

The age breakdown of respondents in 2018 saw a higher percentage of people aged over 60 years participating in the survey (19%), than in 2012 (9%). A lower percentage of people aged between 16 and 29 completed the survey in 2018 (8%), as opposed to 2012, (16%). The age breakdown comparisons are detailed in the table below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Age Group | 2007 | 2012 | 2018 |
| 16-29 years | 18% | 16% | 8% |
| 30-39 years | 14% | 23% | 13% |
| 40-49 years | 21% | 26% | 27% |
| 50-59 years | 27% | 25% | 32% |
| 60 years + | 20% | 9% | 19% |

#### Gender

The gender breakdown of survey respondents in 2018 was 54% female and 46% male. This is a reversal of the 2012 breakdown of 46% female and 54% male.

#### Level of Vision

Half of the respondents to the 2018 survey had a mild or moderate level of vision loss. Only 13% identified as being totally blind. The vision breakdown of respondents is detailed in the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Level of Vision | Percentage of 2018 Respondents |
| Mild – has most of their vision | 6% |
| Moderate – has some vision | 44% |
| Significant – can see very little | 26% |
| Totally blind | 13% |
| Varies depending on environment | 11% |

Of the 360 survey respondents, most people had either been blind or partially sighted all their lives, or had lost their vision between the ages of 18 and 55.

* 43% (156 people), identified that they had been blind or partially sighted all their life.
* 8% (32 people), lost their sight in childhood, before the age of 18.
* 41% (146 people), lost their sight between the ages of 18 and 55.
* 7% (26 people), lost their sight after the age of 55.

Most people had either lived with blindness or low vision for their whole life, or for more than 10 years. A breakdown of these statistics is included in the below table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Length of Time Living with Blindness or Low Vision | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| Less than 2 years | 11 | 3% |
| 2-5 years | 37 | 10% |
| 6-10 years | 43 | 12% |
| More than 10 years | 117 | 33% |
| All my life | 151 | 42% |

#### Additional Disabilities

32% of respondents (115 people), identified that they also had another disability, while the remaining 68% did not. A more extensive breakdown of the disabilities that were disclosed is included below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Disability | Number of Respondents |
| Hearing Impairment | 37 |
| Chronic Illness | 32 |
| Mobility/Functional Disability | 31 |
| Neurological Disability (such as autism spectrum, acquired brain injury, intellectual or developmental disability) | 25 |
| Other | 24 |
| Mental Health Challenge (such as Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) | 15 |
| Learning Disability | 8 |

Survey participants could also list their specific disability, if they felt it did not fit within one of the categories provided. 31 respondents elected to do this, and disclosed additional disability such as Cerebral Palsy, injury resulting from a stroke, multiple sclerosis, Asperges syndrome, Arthritis, post-traumatic stress disorder, autoimmune diseases and physical disability resulting from surgery or injury.

Of the 115 people who disclosed that they have a secondary disability:

* 64 (56%) said that blindness or low vision impacts them more than their other disability;
* 9 people (8%) said that blindness or low vision impacts them less than their other disability; and
* 42 people (37%) said that the impact of blindness or low vision has about the same impact as their other disability.

#### Geographic Profile

The majority of survey respondents (86%), were located in New South Wales, Queensland or Victoria. The breakdown of respondents for each state is included in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| State/Territory | Number of Respondents | Overall Percentage of Survey Respondents |
| New South Wales | 119 | 33% |
| Queensland | 97 | 27% |
| Victoria | 94 | 26% |
| Western Australia | 19 | 5% |
| Australian Capital Territory | 18 | 5% |
| Tasmania | 6 | 2% |
| South Australia | 5 | 1% |
| Northern Territory | 2 | 1% |

71% of survey respondents were located in metropolitan areas, with only 26% identifying that they live in a rural area or town with less than 100,000 people.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Geographic Area | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| Rural area (fewer than 3000 people) | 18 | 5% |
| Small Town (3000 – 15,000 people) | 25 | 7% |
| Town (15,000 – 100,000 people) | 51 | 14% |
| City (100,000 – 1,000,000 people) | 89 | 25% |
| Large City (over 1,000,000 people) | 169 | 47% |
| Don’t know | 8 | 2% |

#### Ethnicity

84% of survey respondents identified as being white/Caucasian. Only 2% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The complete ethnicity breakdown is included in the table below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ethnicity | Number of Respondents |
| White/Caucasian | 304 |
| Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander | 8 |
| South Asian (Indian, Indian of Caribbean descent, Pakistani, Shri Lankan, Bangladeshi) | 9 |
| East Asian (Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese) | 8 |
| Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai) | 6 |
| Middle Eastern (Iranian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Egyptian, Lebanese, Turkish, Syrian, Israeli) | 7 |
| European (French, German, Spanish, Italian, etc.) | 30 |
| United Kingdom (English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh) | 32 |
| Latin American | 4 |
| Black (African, African of Caribbean Descent, etc.) | 6 |
| Filipino | 4 |
| Polynesian, Maori, Pacific or South Sea Islander | 7 |
| Mixed Ethnicity | 15 |

### Education

Respondents were asked to identify opportunities that they had participated in during school life, or during their post-secondary education. Work experience, community volunteering, paid work not related to their chosen area of study and extra-curricular activities were the top four opportunities selected across the survey. Around 16% of those surveyed said that they had not participated in any additional opportunities during their education.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| Work integrated learning (such as work experience or internships) | 149 | 41% |
| Community volunteer opportunities | 136 | 38% |
| Paid work outside of my school, not related to my area of study | 134 | 37% |
| Extra-Curricular school activities | 129 | 36% |
| Team sports in school | 125 | 35% |
| Team sports outside of school | 115 | 23% |
| Student leadership opportunities | 75 | 21% |
| Paid work outside of school but related to my area of study | 55 | 15% |
| Paid work at my school | 7 | 2% |
| None of the above | 58 | 16% |

### Use of Aids and Technology

Survey respondents were asked to identify the technology and mobility aids that they use in daily life.

* 61% of those surveyed said they use an iPhone or iPad.
* 40% use screen magnification software such as Zoomtext, and 46% use a large monitor.
* 28% of respondents use screen reading technology, such as Jaws.

When asked about mobility aids, half of the survey respondents said that they use a white cane, whilst only 9% identified that they work with a dog guide. A full list of technology and visual/mobility aids, along with the number and percentage of survey respondents who use them, is included in the table below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Item | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| iPhone/iPad | 221 | 61% |
| Screen reading programs such as Jaws | 101 | 28% |
| Screen magnifying programs such as Zoomtext | 144 | 40% |
| Large Monitor | 168 | 47% |
| Custom computer/desk work station | 64 | 18% |
| A smartphone or tablet, other than an iPhone or iPad | 109 | 30% |
| Reader apps, such as KNFB or Seeing AI | 76 | 21% |
| Low vision apps such as Be my Eyes | 32 | 9% |
| Close circuit television | 54 | 15% |
| Digital Accessible Information system (DAISY) | 64 | 18% |
| Audio book player | 98 | 27% |
| Refreshable Braille display device | 25 | 7% |
| Talking Watch | 47 | 13% |
| Other talking products, such as a kitchen timer or alarm clock | 66 | 18% |
| Artificial vision products such as eSight or OrCam | 12 | 3% |
| Braille Note-taker | 25 | 7% |
| Brailler, or slate and stylus | 24 | 7% |
| Interveners for the Deafblind | 2 | 0.5% |
| Sign language interpreters | 2 | 0.5% |
| Assistive device such as a hearing aid or FM system | 32 | 9% |
| Specialised transportation system | 7 | 2% |
| Medication and other medical supplies | 95 | 26% |
| White cane | 182 | 51% |
| Dog guide | 32 | 9% |
| Mobility aids such as crutches or walkers | 14 | 4% |
| Low-tech mobility aids for mobility and independent living | 34 | 9% |
| Low-tech vision aids (monoculars, bioptics, etc.) | 85 | 24% |
| Other | 36 | 10% |
| None of the above | 13 | 4% |

### Respondents also had the option to list any other technology or aids that they use on a regular basis. Devices noted by clients here included mini guide, sonar bracelet, GPS devices such as Victor Trek or Trekker Breeze, magnifiers of various types, shaded sunglasses, sensory aids such as fidgets (to assist with focusing), task lighting, large print watches, cochlear implants, contact lenses and reading glasses.

### Use of Braille

Respondents were asked to identify whether or not they were a braille user. 58 respondents (16%), said that they were, while the remaining 84% (302 respondents), were not.

### Qualifications

Participants were asked about the highest level of education they had attained. Over half (61%) of survey participants had completed tertiary qualifications in the form of a diploma, advanced diploma, under graduate or post graduate degree. Of the 360 respondents:

* 47 (13%) said they left high school before completing year 12;
* 34 (9%) said they had completed year 12;
* 59 (16%) had a certificate 1-4 qualification;
* 68 people (19%) had a diploma or advanced diploma qualification;
* 87 people (24%) had completed an undergraduate degree;
* 65 people (18%) possessed a post graduate qualification.

### Relationship with Vision Australia

Survey respondents were asked to describe their relationship with Vision Australia. Almost three quarters of those who participated (73%) said that they were current clients of Vision Australia. 24% said they had previously been clients, but were not currently receiving Vision Australia services. Only five people said they had never been Vision Australia clients. Three identified that they were a friend or family member of a Vision Australia client.

Participants were also asked about whether they had accessed Vision Australia’s employment services.

* 53 people (15% of respondents overall), said they were currently accessing employment services at Vision Australia;
* 94 people (26%) said they had previously accessed employment services from Vision Australia;
* 202 people (56%) said they had never accessed employment services from Vision Australia; and
* 11 people (3%) said they were accessing employment services from another provider.

### Employment Status

49% of those surveyed said they were currently employed. The remaining 51% were not.

In 2012, 64% of respondents of working age were unemployed. This was a decrease from 69% in 2007. The current results would seem to reveal that unemployment rates for people who are blind or have low vision are continuing to decrease. It would also seem that almost half of those surveyed have been experiencing blindness or low vision since before they obtained their first job.

* 46% of those surveyed said they had been living with blindness or low vision since before they obtained their first job;
* 11% said they had been living with blindness or low vision since after they started working, but before they obtained their current job;
* 8% said they had been living with blindness or low vision since after they started their current job;
* 6% said they are currently working, but that they had lost a previous job due to their blindness or low vision;
* 2% said they choose not to work because of their blindness or low vision;
* 4% said they had never looked for work due to their blindness or low vision;
* 9% said they had looked for work, but had been unsuccessful in finding employment due to their blindness or low vision; and
* 13% said they were previously employed, but had not worked since experiencing blindness or low vision.

Of those who identified that they were employed in the 2018 survey:

* 78 people (44% of employed respondents) were working full-time. This compares to 49% of respondents in 2012, and 36% in 2007.
* 73 people (41% of employed respondents) were working part-time. This compares to 32% in 2012 and 46% in 2007.
* 25 people (14% of employed respondents) were casual workers; and
* 1 person was an intern.

Of the 151 people in full-time or part-time employment, 120 (79%) were in permanent roles, while the remaining 31 people (21%) were working under temporary contracts.

### Working Hours

Of those who are currently employed, 73% are working 20 hours or more per week. A full breakdown of working hours is included in the below table:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Hours worked Per week | Number of respondents | Percentage of respondents |
| Less than one hour per week | 2 | 1% |
| 1-10 hours per week | 17 | 9% |
| 11-20 hours per week | 29 | 16% |
| 21-30 hours per week | 42 | 24% |
| 31-40 hours per week | 63 | 36% |
| More than 40 hours per week | 24 | 14% |

Participants who are currently employed were also asked whether they would like to work more or less hours than they do now.

* 27% (48 of 177 respondents) said they would like to work more hours than they do now;
* 18% (32 respondents) said they would like to work less hours than they do now; and
* 55% (97 respondents) said they are currently working the appropriate number of hours.

In 2012, a third of respondents who were working part-time said they would have liked to work more hours. Therefore, while under employment of people who are blind or have low vision is an ongoing issue, the current statistics may indicate a downward trend in this over the past six years.

### Sector and Industry Information

Over half of those who are employed work in either the not-for-profit or private sectors

* 12% of employed respondents (22 people) work for the Federal Government;
* 16% (30 people) work for a State or Territory Government.
* 5% (8 people) work for Local Government;
* 31% (55 people) work in the not-for-profit sector;
* 35% (61 people) work in the private sector;
* 14% (24 people) are self-employed or own a business.

Community or disability services was the industry that employed the greatest number of people who are blind or have low vision, accounting for 17% of survey respondents who are currently employed. This is not dissimilar to the results of the 2012 survey, which revealed that 18% of people who are blind or have low vision were employed in the community services and disability sector. Approximately 14% of respondents in 2018 said they were employed in education, training or childcare. Approximately 9% of those surveyed were employed in health or aged care, compared with 15% in 2012. Furthermore, 15% of respondents in 2012 were employed in Government or defence. In 2018, only 8% of respondents were employed in public administration or the public service. It is possible that employment opportunities in this sector may have decreased during the last six years.

The industry breakdown of employment is included below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Industry | Number of Respondents |
| Accounting and book keeping | 4 |
| Administration and office support | 9 |
| Agriculture, forestry and fishing | 2 |
| Arts and entertainment | 3 |
| Automotive | 1 |
| Call centre or customer service | 5 |
| Community or disability services | 30 |
| Construction | 4 |
| Education, training or childcare | 25 |
| Engineering | 3 |
| Finance, investment or insurance | 3 |
| Healthcare, aged care and medical | 16 |
| Hospitality or tourism | 5 |
| Information technology | 6 |
| Legal services | 3 |
| Management | 6 |
| Manufacturing | 3 |
| Marketing and communications | 2 |
| Mining | 1 |
| Public administration or public service | 15 |
| Real estate | 1 |
| Retail | 8 |
| Sales | 2 |
| Scientific and technical services | 4 |
| Trades and services | 1 |
| Transport and logistics | 1 |
| Other | 14 |

Participants also had an opportunity to list other industries if they felt their role did not fit within one of those provided. Additional areas of work noted here included disability advocacy, career counselling, library/local and family history, supported employment, food packaging, energy, radio, gift card industry, immigration detention and research.

64% of those surveyed work in entry level to mid-senior positions. Only 18% of those employed identified that they occupy senior management or CEO roles.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Level of Employment | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| Entry level | 48 | 27% |
| Mid-senior level role, without supervising anyone | 65 | 37% |
| Supervisor, team leader or middle manager | 23 | 13% |
| Senior manager or CEO | 9 | 5% |
| Self-employed | 15 | 8% |
| Level varies depending on specific job tasks | 17 | 10% |

### Level of Income

40% of those surveyed have a gross income between $40,000 and $79,000 annually. Only 25% of those surveyed earn more than $80,000 per year. The complete breakdown of income levels is included below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Level of Income | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| Less than $20,000 | 20 | 11% |
| $20,000 to $39,999 | 36 | 20% |
| $40,000 to $59,999 | 31 | 18% |
| $60,000 to $79,999 | 39 | 22% |
| $80,000 to $99,999 | 18 | 10% |
| $100,000 to $149,999 | 16 | 9% |
| $150,000 to $199,999 | 7 | 4% |
| More than $200,000 | 4 | 2% |
| Prefer not to say | 6 | 3% |

### Job Satisfaction

59% of those surveyed were either satisfied, or very satisfied in their current role. This compares to 82% of respondents in 2012. Reasons given for high levels of job satisfaction included:

* Challenging and enjoyable role;
* Good relationships with managers/colleagues;
* Friendly and relaxed work environment;
* Working in a role that involves helping others and achieving goals;
* Being able to put skills and qualifications to good use;
* Flexible work hours;
* Employers who are understanding of individual needs;
* Enjoyable variety of work tasks;
* Good workplace mentors;
* Feeling valued and respected in the workplace;
* Collaborative culture;
* Good work life balance;
* Accessible processes for work tasks;
* Staff and colleagues who understand access requirements;
* Role allows maintenance of a good lifestyle;
* Opportunities to upskill;
* Opportunities for leadership; and
* Enjoyment of interacting with people.

24% had neutral feelings about their current role. 16% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Reasons given for low levels of job satisfaction included:

* Having qualifications or additional skills, but being unable to use them due to lack of opportunities;
* Dissatisfaction with management or workplace politics;
* Working in roles or projects which do not align to personal values;
* Lack of challenges or career progression;
* Needing more support with technology in the workplace;
* Changing and uncertain job or work environment;
* Wanting a change after many years in current role;
* Long working hours;
* Physical demands of retail work;
* Lengthy commute to work;
* Meaningless work tasks;
* Lack of ethics in the workplace;
* A desire for more work hours or job permanency;
* Conflicts with work colleagues;
* Discrimination during employment;
* Insufficient wages;
* Poor workplace culture;
* Preferring to work in another professional field but being unsure of where to start; and
* Stress due to high workload.

For the majority of respondents, their level of job satisfaction seemed to be directly linked to whether they had opportunities to utilise their skills and qualifications and whether they felt valued, respected and supported in the workplace. Career progression, or lack of it, was also an issue for many respondents. 47% of those surveyed felt that their current role would lead to career progression, whereas the remaining 53% of those employed were of the view that it would not.

### Approach to Employment and Job Seeking

Survey participants were asked a series of questions to assess how they approach employment and job seeking.

* 63% of respondents said they deliberately apply to, or seek to work with, employers who promote diversity in the workplace;
* A third of respondents said they approach employers that they know have experience in hiring someone who is blind or has low vision;
* 83% said they feel comfortable using the technology or assistive aids that they need for work;
* 77% said they are able to assert their needs at work;
* 75% said they are able to assert their needs to others outside of work; and
* 82% said they feel confident to educate others about their disability.

These statistics may indicate that people with blindness or low vision who are employed are relatively confident in their ability to self-advocate.

### Disclosure of Blindness or Low Vision

Those who are currently employed were asked how they handled disclosure of their blindness or low vision in relation to their current job.

* 18% said they disclosed this information in their job application;
* 7% said they disclosed when contacted for an interview;
* 20% chose to disclose during their job interview;
* 5% disclosed during negotiations for their job;
* 11% disclosed after they were hired, when they needed to request adjustments for their job;
* 8% said they lost their sight while in their current job;
* 5% said they had not disclosed their low vision during their current job;
* 27% said their employer was already aware of their blindness or low vision when they were hired.

### Mentoring

Those who are currently employed were asked a series of questions about access to mentoring in their current role. Only a third of those surveyed had received mentoring relevant to their current job, and only 14% of respondents had participated in a formal mentoring program at work. 14% of those surveyed also said they had mentors relevant to their work who are blind or have low vision. 17% of respondents said that they had mentors who had helped them to successfully find employment. 32% of those employed said they thought mentors had assisted them to be successful in their current job. 23% of those currently employed also said they had served as a mentor to others who are blind or have low vision in their community.

The relatively low percentages of people with access to mentoring opportunities may indicate this as an area for further development of future products and services.

### Data Gathered from those not Currently Working

51% of those surveyed indicated that they are currently unemployed. This compares to 64% in 2012, and 69% in 2007. This would seem to be a positive indicator that unemployment rates for people who are blind or have low vision are slowly decreasing.

Of those respondents not currently employed:

* 89% had held jobs previously. Only 11% had never worked.
* 46% were currently seeking work. The remaining 54% were not.
* Of those currently looking for work, 42% had been job seeking for three years or more. 12% had been job seeking for 1-2 years, 11% for 7-12 months, 23% for 2-6 months and 11% for four weeks or less.
* 61% of those currently seeking work said they had not been called for any interviews as a result of their job search. Only 15% of those job seeking said they had received an offer of employment.
* 64% of those looking for work were seeking part-time employment. 25% were looking for full-time work and 9% were seeking casual employment.

Of those who are not currently job seeking, the primary reasons given for this were that respondents are retired (24%), or they feel they cannot work due to their level of vision (16%). Other reasons given for not currently seeking work are set out in the table below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Reason | Number of Respondents | Percentage of Respondents |
| Stay at home parent or full-time carer | 5 | 5% |
| Full-time student | 4 | 4% |
| Retired | 24 | 24% |
| Do not need to work | 2 | 2% |
| Given up trying to find work | 5 | 5% |
| Concerned about facing discrimination due to disability | 5 | 5% |
| Feel I cannot work due to level of vision | 16 | 16% |
| Too unwell to work | 14 | 14% |
| Recent immigrant | 1 | 1% |
| Other | 15 | 15% |

### Discrimination and Barriers in the Workplace

Survey participants were asked a series of questions about whether they had encountered barriers in the workplace. These questions were asked of everyone, irrespective of their current employment status.

* 63% of survey respondents (232 people) said they had encountered barriers in the workplace;
* 24% (87 people) said they had not; and
* 11% (41 people) said they had not worked.

Of those who had encountered barriers in the workplace:

* 28% said this had occurred during the last 12 months;
* 16% said it had happened in the last 1-2 years;
* 19% said it had taken place 3-4 years ago; and
* 36% said it had occurred 5 years ago or more.

For the majority of those that had encountered barriers in the workplace, it appears that these were only partially resolved when raised with employers.

* 21% of respondents said the issue was resolved with their employer;
* 35% said the matter was partially resolved;
* 24% said the matter was not acted on when reporter to their employer; and
* 20% said they did not raise the matter with their employer.

53% of respondents said they had encountered discrimination or barriers when job seeking. Of those:

* 27% said it had occurred less than 12 months ago;
* 19% said it had happened 1-2 years ago;
* A third said it had taken place 3-4 years ago;
* 39% said that it had occurred 5 years ago or more.

Despite the relatively high instance of people encountering barriers or discrimination in the workplace or when job seeking, 80% said they had never used Vision Australia’s advocacy service to assist in resolving these matters.

### Barriers to Obtaining Employment

Survey participants were asked about the key factors that they felt were barriers to obtaining or maintaining employment. Respondents rated each issue on a scale of 1-5, where 1 was “a major barrier”, and 5 was “not a barrier at all”. These issues have been ranked below in order of significance, based on how many respondents rated them as either a barrier or major barrier:

1. Negative employer attitudes towards people with disability.
2. My ability to get to a workplace (transportation or mobility).
3. Workplace accessibility barriers such as difficulty finding work environments that properly accommodate accessibility needs of people who are blind or have low vision.
4. Technological barriers such as the integration of assistive technology within the work environment
5. Limited specialised job seeking resources or programs to assist in preparing for careers and participating in the workplace.
6. Recruitment processes are not accessible.
7. Accessibility of books and other educational supports to complete a qualification.
8. Financial barriers such as the costs of accessing education.
9. I am unsure of whether to disclose my disability, or hesitant to disclose my disability.
10. My confidence in being able to do the work I desire.
11. My lack of previous work experience.
12. My confidence using assistive technology.
13. The qualifications or skills that I have.

Overall, the survey results reveal that:

* Half of the respondents felt that negative employer attitudes towards people with disability was a barrier to gaining and maintaining employment;
* 45% said that their ability to get to a workplace, either due to transport or mobility reasons, was a key issue;
* 44% said it was difficult to find work environments that properly accommodate the needs of people who are blind or have low vision.

At the opposite end of the scale:

* 67% of respondents said that there skills or qualifications were not a barrier to gaining or obtaining employment;
* 62% said that their confidence in using assistive technology was not a significant barrier; and
* 58% thought that lack of previous work experience was not a key factor in their capacity to gain employment.

Participants were also able to list additional issues that they felt were barriers to obtaining employment. Factors that were noted here included:

* Recruitment criteria that exclude vision impaired applicants, such as the need to have a driver’s license;
* Processes for reporting discrimination in the workplace can often put a person’s job at risk;
* Lack of understanding about vision impairment in the general community;
* Inaccessible software procurement, particularly in government workplaces and no requirement for organisations to consider accessibility as new systems are implemented;
* Lack of support from the school and tertiary education systems;
* There will always be a sighted person who can compete for the job on an equal or better footing;
* Lack of access to transport;
* Prohibitive cost of transport;
* Isolation and loss of confidence due to being out of the workforce;
* The need to retire earlier than planned due to deteriorating eye sight;
* Lack of support to prepare for technological changes in the workplace;
* Limited support from DES providers to find jobs for those who have professional experience;
* Fatigue due to disability, making some work opportunities unsuitable;
* Confidence around disclosure of disability and discussing adaptive technology during interviews;
* Issues in accessing the built environment, such as signage being too small to read;
* Lack of administrative support in the workplace;
* Inadequate training in the use of assistive technology;
* Lack of confidence about fitting in with other staff in a workplace, or challenges in being accepted in the social framework of the organisation;
* Information about potential job opportunities being hard to find;
* Being unable to install assistive software due to cyber security requirements of the organisation;
* Language and cultural barriers;
* Being overqualified for potential roles;
* Inaccessible screening processes by recruitment agencies;
* Being out of the workforce for a long time, thus creating a barrier to future employment;
* Subtle bullying due to vision impairment; and
* Seeing Eye dog discrimination in the workplace.

### Ranking of Employment Supports and Services

Participants were asked to rank a series of existing and potential employment services, in order of what would be most valuable to them. Support with job placement, coaching and mentoring, and work experience, were the top three priorities nominated by respondents as being of greatest value. The result of the ranking, (with 1 being the highest priority), was as follows:

1. Job placement (assistance to apply for and get a job).
2. Professional mentoring or coaching.
3. Work experience.
4. Online courses and resources.
5. Support in understanding my strengths and the jobs that could be matched to my goals.
6. Networking opportunities with peers.
7. Face-to-face learning.
8. Internships and graduate programs.
9. Online job seeking or networking forums.

### Additional Ideas

As an incentive for completing the survey, participants were invited to submit their ideas to be entered into a competition to win a gift card to the value of $100. They were asked to provide their suggestions based on the following question:

“If Vision Australia could do one thing to help people who are blind or have low vision get a job, keep their job or progress in their career, what would it be?”

There were over 150 entries to the competition, however, given that many of the ideas were thematically similar, they have been synthesised and grouped below for the purposes of this report. Contributions by respondents included the following:

#### Raising Public Awareness and Educating Potential Employers

* Combatting discrimination through education, in particular, raising awareness among employers that people who are blind or have low vision are capable and can add significant value to a workplace. Training and education of employers is key; discrimination will not change until attitudes do.
* Educating employers so that they understand supports and services are available to help people who are blind or have low vision to access the technology they need for work.
* Advertising on radio and television regarding availability of Vision Australia’s employment services.
* Media campaigns to demonstrate people who are blind or have low vision performing their jobs effectively and showcasing workplaces that have adapted to suit their needs.
* Ted Talks or documentaries showcasing the skills of people who are blind or have low vision.
* Using school programs to educate the employers of the future about blindness and low vision.
* Training for employers to assist them in improving their recruitment practices and inclusion policies.
* Sharing positive employment stories in the broader community, to affirm the unique capabilities or strengths that people who are blind or have low vision can bring to the workplace.

#### Skill Development, Coaching and Mentoring

* Assisting people who are blind or have low vision to build confidence, as this is one of the most valuable assets a person can have in the employment market.
* Provision of technology training courses, particularly those that would provide clients with a qualification when completed.
* Provision of online coaching and support for people who need assistance in finding or keeping a job.
* Supporting clients to establish their own small businesses through training and mentoring. This could include a mentoring program through TAFE or similar institutions, as well as training in book keeping and other small business skills.
* Sponsored placement in mainstream, industry recognised leadership programs and courses.
* Helping clients to identify jobs or industries that they could excel in, and matching jobs to their skills, training and interests.
* A program designed to assist secondary school students into part-time work to ensure they get adequate work experience and references.
* Support for people to reskill or re-educate after experiencing vision loss.
* Career and pathways counselling to assist people who are blind or low vision in finding meaningful employment.
* Sourcing work experience and volunteering opportunities as well as paid work.
* Training to assist clients to discuss their vision loss constructively with employers.
* Training for clients on using social media strategies to self-promote in the labour market.
* Support with job search skills, including writing a resume, preparing for an interview and responding to selection criteria.
* Coaching or mentoring opportunities with others who are blind or have low vision working in similar industries. “Use your clients to help your clients.”
* Workshops or training on returning to the workplace with a disability.
* Providing out-of-hours training on assistive technology.
* Training for job seekers so that they can discuss wage subsidies and technology funding with potential employers during interviews.
* Establishing a training environment that duplicates the real life situation of a workplace.
* Courses on discrimination laws, and how they can help people who are blind or have low vision to self-advocate and take action.

#### Building Partnerships and Relationships

* Affiliations or partnerships between Vision Australia and other businesses who are open to providing employment opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision.
* Building stronger connections between Vision Australia and the employment market, to help people in finding jobs more quickly.
* Liaising with the public service and private sector to create jobs that are either suitable, or which can be adapted, to people who are blind or have low vision.
* Partnerships between Vision Australia and other recruitment agencies, to help in educating these organisations about what is possible.
* Strengthening relationships with organisations who provide entry level positions to young people, for example in the retail sector. Finding casual work when young is a crucial step in developing skills.
* Organise graduate positions with Government or major private sector organisations so that people who are blind or have low vision can gain real work experience.

#### Advocacy

* Lobbying the Government to remove barriers to obtaining employment assistance. Several clients highlighted that they were ineligible to receive job services while still employed and said this had required them to leave one job before they could get help in finding another. For some, this in turn led to difficult transitions between jobs and increased reliance on savings and income support.
* Lobbying to improve access to websites, documents and other materials.
* Lobbying to encourage all industries to commit to employing 10% of their workforce as people with disability.
* Advocacy support during job interviews.
* Educating other DES providers so that they can more effectively work with people who are blind or have low vision.
* Advocate to educational institutions around removing barriers to accessing professional qualifications needed to enter the workforce or advance your career.

#### Tailored Job Services

* Ensuring that people who are blind or have low vision get the right opportunities and assistance, so that they can demonstrate their worth and value to employers.
* Ensuring that Vision Australia staff lead by example; treating clients with empathy and respect, and listening to individual needs without assuming they know what is best.
* Ongoing support after gaining employment, to ensure that people can retain a job on a long-term basis.
* Setting up a database of occupations and suggested employers that people could utilise when job seeking. Another iteration of this idea was a job network similar to Seek that could focus on employers who embrace diversity.
* Establishment of manufacturing or farming facilities that could provide jobs for people who are blind or have low vision.
* Offering work from home opportunities to clients that suit their capabilities and interests.
* Encouraging employers to implement flexible work practices such as working from home, to minimise the impact of factors such as vision fatigue on a person’s career.
* Ensuring that both the person with disability and their employer get the support they need.
* Establish a graduate program for people who are blind or have low vision.
* Being quick to respond and provide support when new systems are introduced in the workplace that require people to become familiar with new technology or develop additional skills.

#### Networking and Events

* A careers expo, including presentations from others who are blind or have low vision about how they have overcome barriers in the workplace.
* Ensure that clients have a job support network when they commence employment.
* Providing networking events for people who are blind or have low vision to meet potential employers.
* Job searching workshops or information days around job seeking strategies.
* A peer support network or mentoring service so that people feel less alone in their journey to find employment.

#### Expanding Current Services

* Increasing reach of Vision Australia’s DES services.
* Increased availability of employment consultants in more Vision Australia regional sites.
* Greater visibility of Vision Australia’s employment services. Several clients said they were unaware that these were available.
* Roll-out of Brighter Futures employment program to a broader age group.
* Assistance to look for career development opportunities when you are still in your current role.
* Strive to assist clients in obtaining permanent employment, rather than contract roles. Having access only to casual employment creates barriers when certainty of income is needed to obtain home loans, etc.

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