**Equity in employment for disabled people**

# Systemic Barriers to Employment

There are many systemic issues that affect disabled people’s full participation in society, particularly in relation to employment. For example, societal attitudes, transport, housing, digital inequity, and the devaluation of disabled people. Unemployment has a detrimental impact on health and wellbeing and disabled people’s inequitable access to employment add to already poor health and social outcomes.[[1]](#endnote-2)

## Societal Attitudes

Limited employment opportunities and employer attitudes create barriers to employment for disabled people to gain and maintain employment”.[[2]](#endnote-3) These attitudes can extend to employers’ willingness to provide reasonable accommodations.

Some attitudes towards disabled people can be further disabling. For example, there is often an assumption that disabled people cannot work, and that because a disabled person has a physical or sensory impairment that they will also have a learning disability, or that the behaviour of some Autistic people, e.g. lack of eye contact, may be misinterpreted as unprofessional.[[3]](#endnote-4)

## Transport

Being able to access to affordable and accessible transport impacts a person’s ability to gain employment. Barriers to transport can also lead to poor health outcomes due to social exclusion, affecting disabled people’s access to employment and negatively impacting their well-being.[[4]](#endnote-5)

Access to both private and public transport key in the discussion of accessible transport choices. Car ownership is unattainable for many due to systemic inequity in relation to employment and lower incomes, as well as the high cost of vehicle modifications.[[5]](#endnote-6) Disabled people who do not have access to a private vehicle, and cannot afford taxi services, even with the Total Mobility scheme, rely on accessible public transport[[6]](#endnote-7) and are more likely to use a taxi service.[[7]](#endnote-8) Transport costs are a significant barrier to employment for disabled people and mitigating these costs with sufficient funding is an important step towards reducing this barrier.

## Housing

Inaccessible and unaffordable housing is a huge barrier to disabled people being employed. If you can’t move to where a job is because you can’t find an accessible home or neighbourhood, then you may not be able to take the job. With the low target of only fifteen percent for Kainga Ora accessible new builds, little will be change.

The issue of housing affordability is intertwined with the lack of Universal Design[[8]](#endnote-9) access to housing for many disabled people, especially for those who are mobility impaired. There is a need for the interconnected issues of affordability and accessibility to be considered together.

Statistics NZ reports that in the September 2019 quarter, there were 1,903,400 private dwellings in Aotearoa New Zealand.[[9]](#endnote-10) However, according to Lifemark, an organisation that promotes safe and accessible homes, less than 1% of these private dwellings met UD standards despite it being no extra cost to implement 90 percent of the Lifemark accessibility standards.

## Digital Inequity

Equitable access to technology is an important factor in reducing barriers to employment. Many disabled people are excluded from digital participation due to prohibitive costs of specialised devices and software, and these devices and software are often in accessible.[[10]](#endnote-11)

Digital barriers are not just confined to on-the-job situations. These barriers exist at all stages of the employment journey. For example, in accessing job advertisements and application forms through not having access to devices, data, or the skills to use them.

## Poverty

In Aotearoa New Zealand there is a strong correlation between poverty and receiving a benefit. Disabled people are especially affected,[[11]](#endnote-12) with 54 percent of main beneficiaries being disabled.[[12]](#endnote-13) For those for are employed, poverty can still be a reality as disabled people are more likely to have lower incomes than non-disabled people[[13]](#endnote-14) and wages have declined relative to the cost of living.[[14]](#endnote-15) For example, inflation over the past twenty-nine years since Support Funds were introduced has resulted in a 61 percent decrease in purchasing power,[[15]](#endnote-16) which disproportionately affects those on low wages.

## Devaluation of Disabled People

Discrimination, such that exists in the workplace and application process, can result in disabled people being further marginalised and devalued.[[16]](#endnote-17) This can be seen in discriminatory schemes such as the Minimum Wage Exemption, which allows businesses to employ disabled people for less than the minimum wage.[[17]](#endnote-18) There are currently around 900 people employed through the scheme, with 70% paid less than $5 an hour and 25% paid less than $2, all before tax.[[18]](#endnote-19)

Low expectations are something many in the disabled community experience, with people often being told they are not destined for higher education and, at times, discouraged from pursuing emp

1. Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report. (2018). *Whakamana Tāngata: Restoring dignity to social security in New Zealand.* Retrieved from: http://www.weag.govt.nz/weag-report/ [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Wilkinson-Meyers et al. (2014) Reducing disablement with adequate and appropriate resources: a New Zealand perspective”. Disability & Society. 29 (10), 1540-1553. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Ministry of Health. (2017). *A Guide to Community Engagement with People with Disabilities.* Retrieved from: https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/guide-community-engagement-people-disabilities-2nd-edn-apr17.docx [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Rose, E., Witten, K., & McCreanor, T. (2009). Transport related social exclusion in New Zealand: evidence and challenges. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online, 4*(3), 191-203. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Woodbury, E. (2012). *Auto-Mobile: Disabled Drivers in New Zealand* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Otago]. Our Archive. Retrieved from: https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10523/3715/WoodburyEstherZ2013PhD.pdf?sequence=1 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. CCS Disability Action. (2018). *Briefing to Hon Phil Twyford Minister for Transport.* Retrieved from: https://www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/assets/resource-files/Briefing-to-the-Minister-of-Transport.pdf [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. Velho, R. (2019). Transport accessibility for wheelchair users: A qualitative analysis of inclusion and health. *International Journal of Transportation Science and Technology, 8*(2), 103-115. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. Auckland Design Manual. Universal Design. Accessed from: https://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-subjects/universal\_design [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Statistics NZ. Dwelling and household estimates: September 2019 quarter. Accessed from: https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/dwelling-and-household-estimates-september-2019-quarter [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. Smith, K. (2016). *New Zealanders with disabilities and their Internet use.* Retrieved from:https://icdc.aut.ac.nz/\_\_data/assets/pdf\_file/0008/73439/New-Zealanders-with-disabilities-and-their-internetuse.pdf. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report. (2018). *Whakamana Tāngata: Restoring dignity to social security in New Zealand.* Retrieved from: http://www.weag.govt.nz/weag-report/ [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Statistics NZ. (2013). *Disability survey: 2013.* Retrieved from: https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/disability-survey-2013 [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report. (2018). *Whakamana Tāngata: Restoring dignity to social security in New Zealand.* Retrieved from: http://www.weag.govt.nz/weag-report/ [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Reserve Bank of New Zealand Te Pūtea Matua. (2022). *Inflation Calculator:* Value of $1 from 2002 Q1 to 2022 Q1. Retrieved from: https://infcal.rbnz.govt.nz/inflation-calculator [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Ministry of Health. (2017). *A Guide to Community Engagement with People with Disabilities.* Retrieved from: https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/guide-community-engagement-people-disabilities-2nd-edn-apr17.docx [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. Employment New Zealand. (2022). *Minimum wage exemption for people with disability.* Retrieved from: https://www.employment.govt.nz/hours-and-wages/pay/minimum-wage/minimum-wage-exemptions/#scrollto-showing-that-the-wage-is-fair [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. 1news. (2022). *Minimum wage exemption still in place for disabled workers.* Retrieved from: https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/04/12/minimum-wage-exemption-still-in-place-for-disabled-workers/ [↑](#endnote-ref-19)