

Inclusive Banyule - Inclusive Business

Disability-friendly

Inclusive Language Guide

Inclusive language empowers everyone

'Ableism' is the exclusion of people with disability in our society. It's often expressed and reinforced through language. Using ableist language actually harms people with disability, whatever the user's intention. Many words and terms once commonly used to describe people with disability are now outdated. Terms such as 'moron' originally were used as a medical diagnosis, which framed disability as a 'problem' of the person. Nowadays, we understand that the problem is social: that differently-abled people are excluded by the physical and cultural barriers society imposes.

Imagine how a person who lives with disability must feel. They could be a Paralympian, put on a pedestal for winning gold medals for Australia one day, then back to normal life facing barriers and discrimination the next. But it's not just our athletes who experience this. Unfortunately, every day people with disability, and older people, experience harmful attitudes in the form of direct discrimination – an offence under Australian law. Sometimes our attitudes are shaped by 'unconscious bias', the assumptions we make about people with disability and older people, and their capacity to make decisions and think independently. We can all make errors – just apologise and keep on learning!

Here are some examples of discriminatory language and the preferred options you can use to describe people with disability and older adults:

DISCRIMINATORY LANGUAGE	PREFERRED LANGUAGE
afflicted/crippled by suffers from handicapped special needs	has a disability lives with disability has a chronic health condition women with disability, children with disability, etc
oldies biddies old man / woman	older people seniors the aged
autistic high-functioning autism profoundly autistic	person with autism neuro-atypical neurodivergent
confined to a wheelchair wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user person who uses a wheelchair
paraplegic quadriplegic	person with paraplegia person with quadriplegia
special needs mentally retarded simple	person with cognitive disability person with intellectual disability person with a learning disability