

Improving Responsiveness Towards People with Disability

ACOLA Plain Language Summary

About this project:

The Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) is an independent research institute. ACOLA works with governments and other organisations to find answers to complex problems. Recently, ACOLA has been reviewing the training people receive about disability, especially those working in Australia's health, social services, education and justice sectors. These sectors were chosen because people with disability have shared many negative experiences they have had with them. For example, in schools or hospitals.

People with disability felt that these experiences happened because people working in these sectors did not understand them, or their needs properly. They felt that they were seen to have less abilities or the same needs as other people without a disability and were therefore not well supported or treated unfairly. Many people with disability said that other things about them, such as their sexuality, culture and gender increased the likelihood of negative experiences.

These negative experiences include:

- not being able to access services
- not being listened to or fully included in services, or
- poor quality services and support.

The impact of these negative experiences on people with disability include:

- poor health and wellbeing
- less education or opportunity to gain qualifications
- less employment opportunities, and
- financial hardship.

Improving the way people with disabilities are responded to:

ACOLA's work suggests that training about disability may help improve the way people respond to people with disability, especially those working in Australia's health, social services, education and justice sectors. Training is also likely to help people become more aware of any incorrect or negative views they have about disability.

However, findings from this project showed that people working in these sectors do not always receive training about disability. When people do receive training, it does not always cover the issues and content known to improve the services people with disability receive. The quality of training also varies, with the content of many courses failing to align with what is widely considered to be good practice.

ACOLA recommends that all people in Australia's health, social services, education and justice sectors receive training about disability. Training should also be designed and delivered with, or by people with disability.

What good training looks like

Good training, which is more likely to help people understand and respond to people with disability, should align with six key principles. These are:

1. A commitment to 'nothing about us without us'. This means, training courses about disability should be developed and delivered with or by people with disability.
2. Training should improve knowledge, skills and attitudes towards people with disability.
3. The people being trained should have the opportunity to work with people with disability.
4. Training should make people aware of people's biases or incorrect views about disability.
5. Training should be designed for the job people perform. For example, training about disability for teachers should be focused on how to support students with disability in classrooms, parent-teacher meetings and the playground.
6. Training should be regular and not a once-off experience.

ACOLA has developed a tool to help training providers, including universities, consider how to apply these principles in training and education.

Future actions

ACOLA has identified a range of actions training providers, professional bodies, employers and governments can take to specifically improve the way people are trained and respond to people with disability. These actions sit under five broad categories as follows:

1. Active participation

- More people with disability should be employed by training providers, particularly in senior positions to influence change.
- Organisations promote, respect and uphold the rights of people with disability
- There are standards and expectations for inclusion that employers need to realise.

2. Sector planning and actions

- Clear expectations should be set for all sectors about the need to complete training about disability.
- A broad range of resources about disability and inclusion should be designed with or by people with disability. These resources should be designed for each sector.

3. Training packages

- Training provider staff should complete training about disability, to improve their knowledge and how they can improve the courses they deliver.
- Training should be regularly reviewed to ensure it aligns with good practice.
- Refresher training should be completed by staff regularly.

4. Knowledge collection

- Training outcomes for each sector should be monitored to ensure knowledge, skills and attitudes towards people with disability improve.

5. Government leadership

- There should be a focus on increasing knowledge across sectors about how they can work together to better meet the needs of people with disability.
- Governments direct and support the review of training outcomes, to ensure that knowledge, skills and attitudes towards people with disability improve.