

Standards of Workforce Information for Agencies in the State Services



Collecting disability information on the State services workforce

We must use common workplace information standards across the State services.

High quality workforce information is important for agencies to be able to recruit, develop and deploy the people they need. It enables them to better understand the make-up and needs of their workforce and develop workforce and workplace-related policies. It is also increasingly important for agencies to understand the diversity of their workforce, and how it reflects the wider diversity of New Zealand. Understanding the diversity then creates the potential to increase inclusion. Workforce information needs to be collected and reported in a consistent way across the State services. This allows agencies to compare their information with that of other agencies, as well as at the system level.

Statistics NZ (Stats NZ) does not have a statistical standard for disability status however endorses the use of Washington Group Short Set questions to assign disability status in large-scale surveys that are not disability specific. International jurisdictions do not have a common standard method of collecting disability related data. Given this, the advice in this publication may be updated to align with any new guidance from Stats NZ or internationally.

Guidance for agencies on collecting disability information

This guidance supports State service agencies with collecting and reporting disability status information about their staff. The guidance also supports managers to have conversations with their staff regarding reasonable accommodations that may be needed and how greater inclusion can be affected. This publication was developed in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Development, the [Office for Disability Issues](#) and other stakeholders. It also used an Australian resource¹ for part of the content. Measuring disability is an area with many challenges. This publication provides advice on what, when and how to ask questions about disability.

Collecting and reporting disability status information in a robust and transparent way is important for a number of reasons. Possibly the most important reason is to know your staff and ensure an equitable environment exists for all staff members, including any reasonable accommodations that may be required to achieve this. It is also important to understand the diversity and inclusive nature of your organisation, and it's current response to diversity. Measurement will assist in identifying your organisation's future diversity and inclusion needs and responsibilities.

¹ [Sharing and Monitoring Disability Information in your Workforce A Guide for Employers May 2016.](#)

At the system level, it is important to collect information to assess progress towards fulfilling our responsibilities under the [New Zealand Disability Strategy](#), particularly to inform actions to increase the employment of disabled people. We also have reporting obligations under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)².

Why you are asking

Disabled people often experience discrimination and exclusion, particularly in employment. People may therefore be wary of why they are being asked about their disability status and reluctant to identify themselves as disabled. It is therefore important to give a clear explanation about why you are asking for the information and how you intend to use it.

The purpose of asking your staff about their disability status will often dictate how you ask, and whether you ask anonymously or in an identifiable way. If you are collecting information on impairments, adjustments or accommodations needed, then identifiable information is necessary. Caution is needed when acquiring this as part of the recruitment process.

If, however, the primary purpose is to understand the number of disabled staff who work for your organisation, or how outcomes for disabled staff compare to those for non-disabled staff, it is acceptable to collect information anonymously. Anonymous collection may be more effective with building an organisational picture of diversity and inclusion, particularly at the recruitment stage.

What gets in the way and what helps

Some applicants or employees may choose not to share information about their disability status because they do not need a workplace adjustment, or they believe their disability does not affect their ability to perform their job. Others may choose not to share information, even if they require a workplace adjustment, for fear of negative repercussions. It is important that staff sharing disability status trust their employer to safeguard their personal information. Building this trust is critical in getting an accurate picture of disability status in your workforce.

Surveys undertaken in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom consistently report fear of discrimination as a major reason why disabled people choose not to share information³. It is important to communicate widely reasons for collecting the information and that all employees should be asked the same questions. Tell employees why you are asking—for example, reiterate that the purpose is to encourage employees who need an adjustment to ask for it, and that the organisation needs to monitor progress on disability and diversity. If appropriate, profile employees (including senior staff) who have been open with their information and what the benefits have been (e.g. they were able to ask for an adjustment to take part in a learning and development opportunity which later led to a promotion).

Some of the many reasons that staff may choose not to share their disability status are:

- Disability does not impact on their work.
- Concern that disability is not well understood by their manager and/or co-workers.
- Worry that they will be seen less favourably by their manager or overlooked for promotion or other development opportunities.
- Uncertainty about why they were being asked or how the information would be used.

² Article 31 relates to Statistics and data collection. Article 27 relates to work and employment.

³ See for example Shrader, Malzer, Erikson, Bruyere, *Emerging Employment Issues for People with Disabilities*, Cornell University, ILR School, Employment and Disability Institute, December 2011. SANE Research Bulletin 14: Working life and mental illness, August 2011.

When to ask

In the employment life cycle, there are a number of opportunities to ask staff to share information about their disability status. It is important to note though, that disability status is not static and there is a need to check in with your staff periodically during the employment relationship. This check in ideally should be every two years or so and could be part of an engagement survey.

There are a number of distinct time points when you can ask staff to share their disability status:

Applications, recruitment and selection. During this process the focus should be on any accommodations or adjustments that may be needed to enable the applicant to participate in the recruitment process on the same basis as other applicants. Disability status may impact on some roles, but it should not be a selection criterion. Particular care needs to be taken that disability status is not perceived as a deselection criterion. Including a strong diversity and inclusion commitment statement at this stage can help to mitigate this risk.

Pre-employment medicals and other tests. Some occupations in the State service require this testing prior to employment. Disability status is pertinent to these tests but for most roles should not adversely impact the candidate's employability. Providing clarity around the purpose and requirements of the testing is critical.

Job offer. The job offer may need to take into account disability status, especially if the successful candidate requires accommodations of some kind. This may be as simple as flexibility in working hours but may also be tangible adjustments to the working environment. It is important that any reasonable accommodations agreed with the candidate are adequately documented.

Induction and onboarding. This is the time when trust in the employment relationship can be built in order to facilitate greater sharing of disability status information. When a member of staff is being inducted to the organisation this offers an opportunity to collect detailed information on their disability status, but more importantly on any accommodations or adjustments that they require.

Performance appraisal and career development. This part of the employment relationship offers an opportunity to 'check in' with the staff member and identify whether the accommodations or adjustments they require have changed. There is some evidence to suggest that disabled people may be excluded from professional development opportunities as they are often not offered in an accessible form or not offered to employees that work part time hours (which may be more likely for disabled employees, but may also be the case for non-disabled employees).

Staff engagement surveys. As previously noted, disability status is not static. As the workforce ages and people can acquire (or lose) a disability at any time it is important to revisit the question of disability status on a regular basis, ideally every two years. This should be with all staff, not just those who identified as disabled.

How to ask

The nature of certain stages of the employment life cycle dictate how disability status is identified. During the application, recruitment and selection process, disability status and accommodation/ adjustment needs for the recruitment process can be asked through a written questionnaire. This can form part of the candidate's application form or may be a separate form to maintain confidentiality. Any pre-employment medicals and other tests will often dictate how disability status is asked. In a job offer, confirmation of accommodations or adjustments should be given in writing⁴.

During the induction and onboarding process, a mixture of verbal and written methods could be used to ascertain disability status and identify any further accommodations needed. Similarly, in ongoing performance appraisals, career development and staff engagement surveys, a mixture of verbal and written methods can be used to ascertain or revisit disability status.

⁴ For more information see the [Lead Toolkit](#)

Whatever method is used to ascertain disability status, a number of points need to be observed:

- Be clear about why you are asking. Understand the difference between monitoring for workforce data and assisting individuals with workplace adjustment.
- Make it clear that the sharing of information regarding disability status is entirely voluntarily.
- Identify why you are collecting the information and how important you view it.
- Ensure questions are presented in an [accessible format](#).
- Identify what will happen with the information the individual has shared (for example, will it be stored in an HR system). This includes who has access to it and why that might occur, how it is stored and the ability to see and correct information. You should also consider how and when it will be reviewed.
- It is good practice to allow users to update their own records in systems used to collect such information. This is especially the case for disability status.

What to ask and when

The language and terminology used can have a significant impact on the likelihood of an individual sharing their disability status. There are many approaches to asking for disability status and this publication offers several options in the form of question sets, highlighted in the following table:

Question area/questions	Good	Better	Best
Set A: Disability and accommodation self-identification questions (this is the minimum you should be asking).	✓		
Set B: Accommodation related extension questions and Set C1: Short questions approach for workplace data		✓	
Set B: Accommodation related extension questions and Set C2: Long questions approach for workplace data			✓

The recommended question sets are included in Appendix 1. These can be adjusted to suit the context in which they are being used, such as in an interview or a questionnaire, utilising the options identified in the questions. The 'intent' of the question should be maintained, such as during an interview, the question could be asked in a more conversational tone. A question can be omitted if the answer is already known, such as when the person asking has been a manager of the individual for a while, or if it is known the disability status has not changed. You may choose to ask all people the same questions.

The questions proposed in sets C1 and C2 are based on questions developed and tested by the Washington Group (WG), a United Nations Statistics Commission City Group formed of representatives of national statistical offices⁵. The group is working on developing methods to better improve statistics on persons with disabilities⁶ globally, with input from various international agencies and experts. These include UN agencies, bilateral aid agencies, NGOs, disabled persons' organisations, and researchers. The Group produces several question sets that build upon the 'Short Set' of six questions⁷, however they were not designed to be used in isolation. They are also not designed to measure prevalence of disability in a specific population. Rather, it is intended that these questions should be used in conjunction with other measurement tools, i.e. include the WG Short Set within a larger survey or registration form to enable disaggregation of other measures (employment status, educational attainment, etc.) by disability status.

⁵ More information is available at the [Washington Group Disability website](#).

⁶ This is a direct quote from the Washington Group. In NZ it is more appropriate to use disabled people, but the original is retained here for clarity.

⁷ The Washington Group Disability website provides more information on the [short set of questions](#).

When questions are used as part of a survey it is recommended that an introductory statement is included to demonstrate to a respondent that they have moved to a new topic with a health context. An example of this would be:

“The next questions ask about difficulties you might have doing certain activities because of a health problem.”

The Washington Group recommends that the questions be placed with other demographic questions such as age, gender and ethnicity, or towards the beginning of a section that deals with health information. They should not be placed at the end of the questionnaire. Using these questions, an individual is identified as disabled if they respond: ‘A lot of difficulty’ or ‘Cannot do at all’ to any one of questions W1 to W6, W8 or W9; or if they felt depressed or worried, nervous or anxious ‘A lot’ on a daily basis (questions W10 to W13).

Employment lifecycle stage	Why are you asking?	Questions
Application, recruitment and selection	Accommodation	Set A
Induction and onboarding	Accommodation	Set B
	Workforce data	Set C1, set C2 better
Induction and onboarding	Accommodation	Set A or B
Staff engagement surveys	Accommodation	Set A, set B better
	Workforce data	Set C1, set C2 better

The content of the table above highlights the suggested timing and use of the different question sets identified in this document. Whilst it is perfectly feasible to use Set A at all stages of the employment lifecycle, the comprehensiveness and usefulness of the disability status information gained will be reduced. It is recognised that respondent burden is a factor – with the more comprehensive question sets including a high number of questions – however, the benefit of the additional detail gained is likely to offset this. It is an open question whether the consistency of testing (i.e. using the same question set at each stage of the employment lifecycle) is important.

Considerations when selecting question sets

There are several things to consider when selecting the questions to be used. These are:

Purpose. The purpose of the collection will, in many circumstances, dictate the questions needed and how they are asked. Most importantly in this is whether the data is collected anonymously.

Privacy. The privacy of the data collected as part of assessing the disability status of employees is critical. This needs to be in accordance with legislation in the area, especially the Privacy Act 1993.

Language. Whilst the questions propose specific wording, it is recognised that in some contexts, wording may need to be altered. It is important though that the intent of the question is maintained and any proposed changes are tested to ensure this.

Data collection. The purpose for the collection will also influence the data collection method. It is important to consider how this is implemented and whether guided completion, self-completion or a mixture of both is used. Whatever method is used, it is suggested that the data collection instrument is piloted before use.

Where to get more information

Below are links to several resources that may assist with gathering disability status information, and other:

- [Office for Disability Issues](#)
- [Lead Toolkit – A guide for employing disabled people](#)
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – United Nations Human Rights – Office of the High Commissioner](#)
- [Washington Group on Disability Statistics](#)
- [International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health \(ICF\) – World Health Organisation](#)
- [New Zealand Disability Strategy](#)
- [Office for Disability Issues – Be Accessible Business Toolkit](#)
- [Office for Disability Issues - Employing disabled people](#)

See the SSC website for further information on [expectations on agencies workforce information](#).

Appendix one: questions

Set A. Ask these two:

AQ1. [Do/Does] [you/he/she/they] have a disability?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

AQ2. If yes, [Do/Does] [you/he/she/they] require adjustments to the working environment or arrangements?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

Set B: Accommodation related extension questions

If you would like to seek further or more extensive information about an individual's accommodation needs, you can ask some or all the following questions instead of AQ2 above:

BQ1. Has [your/his/her/their] workplace been set up in a way to account for difficulties [you/he/she/they] have in doing certain activities?

- a) Yes, fully
- b) Yes, partially (**go to BQ3**)
- c) Not at all (**go to BQ6**)
- d) I do not have difficulties that require accommodation
- e) Prefer not to say

(go to BQ4)

BQ2. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] need any modification?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

BQ3. Is [your/his/her/their] work schedule arranged to account for difficulties [you/he/she/they] have in doing certain activities?

- a) Yes, fully
- b) Yes, partially (go to BQ5)
- c) Not at all (go to BQ6)
- d) I do not have difficulties that require accommodation
- e) Prefer not to say

(go to BQ6)

BQ4. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] need any other arrangement of [your/his/her/their] work schedule?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

(go to BQ6)

BQ5. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] need [your/his/her/their] work schedule to be changed?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

BQ6. Are [your/his/her/their] work tasks arranged to account for difficulties [you/he/she/they] have in doing certain activities?

- a) Yes, fully
- b) Yes, partially (go to BQ7)
- c) Not at all (go to BQ8)
- d) Prefer not to say

(End)

BQ7. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] need any other arrangement of [your/his/her/their] tasks?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

(End)

BQ8. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] need [your/his/her/their] tasks to be changed?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

(End)

Set C: Activity limitation questions based on Washington Group short sets

These can be asked in conjunction with some or all the questions in Set B to provide further information on accommodations or adjustments that may be required.

Set C1: Short questions approach

W1. [Do/Does] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty seeing, even when wearing [your/his/her/their] glasses? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W2. [Do/Does] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty hearing, even when using a hearing aid(s)? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W3. [Do/Does] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty walking or climbing steps? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W4. Using [your/his/her/their] usual language, [do/does] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W5. [Do/does] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty remembering or concentrating? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W6. [Do/does] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W7. [Do/does] [you/he/she/they] experience any mental health conditions that have lasted for six months or more?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Prefer not to say

Set C2: Long questions approach

Ask questions W1 to W6 from Set C1 above followed by:

W8. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty raising a 2-litre bottle of water or soda from waist to eye level? Would you say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W9. [Do/Does/Would] [you/he/she/they] have difficulty using [your/his/her] hands and fingers, such as picking up small objects, for example, a button or pencil, or opening or closing containers or bottles? Would you say...

- a) No difficulty
- b) Some difficulty
- c) A lot of difficulty
- d) Cannot do at all
- e) Prefer not to say

W10. How often [do/does] [you/he/she/they] feel worried, nervous or anxious? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) A few times a year
- e) Never
- f) Prefer not to say

W11. Thinking about the last time [you/he/she/they] felt worried, nervous or anxious, how would [you/he/she/they] describe the level of these feelings? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) A little
- b) A lot
- c) Somewhere in between a little and a lot
- d) Prefer not to say

W12. How often [do/does] [you/he/she/they] feel depressed? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) A few times a year
- e) Never
- f) Prefer not to say

W13. Thinking about the last time [you/he/she/they] felt depressed, how depressed did [you/he/she/they] feel? Would [you/he/she/they] say...

- a) A little
- b) A lot
- c) Somewhere in between a little and a lot
- d) Prefer not to say

W14. Do [you/he/she/they] experience any other mental health issues?

- a) Never
- b) Sometimes
- c) Often
- d) Always
- e) Prefer not to say