

Pilot project – Coaching service for APS managers of employees who are blind or vision impaired

To increase the employment of people who are blind or have low vision in the Australian Public Service, we need to better support managers and staff during various stages of their employment.

This pilot project would provide managers of both new starters and existing staff who are blind or have low vision access to expert, practical advice from Vision 2020 Australia member organisations, to set up the workplace and the employee for a long, successful career with the APS.

Background

Increasing the number of people with disabilities employed in the Australian Public Service is a priority, however sometimes very practical issues can prove barriers to successful employment. For example, for people who are blind or have low vision, these challenges can include managers and other staff:

- not having knowledge of what kinds of assistive technology is needed, or how this interfaces/works with existing systems
- not knowing what broader adjustments might be required in the workplace, from arrangements for guiding a person who is blind to meetings through to how environmental factors (such as glare) might need to be addressed
- not feeling equipped to have conversations about the person's disability and how/where they want this communicated or discussed with others – and not wanting to offend or upset them by 'saying the wrong thing'.

There are simple, practical solutions to many of these issues that, if openly discussed and put in place early, can support very positive work outcomes.

This pilot project is proposed to explore how the provision of timely, simple access to practical advice provided by experts can equip managers and others employing people who are blind or have low vision to effectively and confidently support the transition of both new starters and existing employees who are blind or have low vision into the workplace.

Key elements of proposed coaching service

The key elements of the proposed coaching service that Vision 2020 Australia members could provide would be:

- training and supporting the APS manager in how to assist and work with someone who is blind or has low vision. This would include:
 - advising on appropriate communication methods and language
 - 'guiding' techniques and training
 - specific OH&S advice to ensure the safety of the employee

- guide dog etiquette
- reviewing the workplace assessment in relation to supports and adaptive technology, if necessary
- providing general disability awareness training to the APS manager and the broader workplace team in the context of vision loss.

This training could be supported by:

- access to peer support from people with lived experience
- disability awareness resources specific to blindness and low vision.

The coaching service would complement any existing services provided to individuals with disability who receive supports under Disability Employment Services or other programs as it assists the APS manager directly rather than the employee.

Vision 2020 Australia member involvement

Vision 2020 Australia is the national peak body for eye health and vision care, and part of its mission is to maximise opportunities for people who are blind or have low vision to participate socially and economically. Its membership includes a range of blindness and low vision service providers, all of whom are experienced in providing specialist support.

Under this proposal, Vision 2020 Australia would establish a panel of members who would be able to provide these coaching services to APS agencies.

The coaching service would consist of **6 one-hour coaching sessions**:

- pre-commencement
- upon commencement
- two weeks post-commencement
- one month post-commencement
- 3 months post-commencement
- 6 months post-commencement.

Funding model

It is proposed the pilot program will be on a fee-for-service basis through a Memorandum of Understanding between the individual Departments and the service provider. Potential links to existing programs such as the Job Access program and the Employee Assistance Fund (EAF) will also be explored. Vision2020 Australia would work with the clients to agree on an appropriate costing that is tailored to the level of service required.

Monitoring and evaluation of pilot project

Vision 2020 Australia would gather and analyse data from both employers and employees to assess the level of impact of the pilot project.

APS Disability Champions Network

Vision 2020 Australia is keen to present to the Disability Champions Network, to discuss and explore how this opportunity to increase the employment of people who are blind or have low vision could best fit within agency priorities and recruitment approaches.