Inclusive Language
Respect for disability inclusion

Why do we have an inclusive language guide?

At AGAA we treat each other with human dignity and respect. One of the ways we do this is through the language we use. Language is a powerful tool and can have significant impact, both positive and negative. Inclusive language enables everyone to feel valued and respected and can help create a safe, inclusive, and equitable workplace.

Not all disabilities are visible, and not all people with a disability will be comfortable speaking openly about them. A person is not defined by their disability so it is important that language we use acknowledges this, and that we see the whole person and not just one aspect of their identity. We can acknowledge the barriers faced by people with disabilities without patronising; and we can celebrate their contributions and achievements without using labels such as "inspiration" which can reinforce harmful stereotypes.

Words to choose

Instead of	Use
People living with diability, the disabled	People with disability
Suffers from, victim of, crippled by	Has a chronic health condition
Disabled toilet	Accessible toilet
Wheelchair bound	Wheelchair user
Fell on deaf ears	Was not addressed
Handicapped person	Person living with a disability/cognitive disability/intellectual disability
Mute	Non-verbal
Brain-damaged	Person with an acquired brain injury
That's lame	That's uncool

Terms and phrases to rethink

- Avoid using language that implies people with disabilities are victims, or are inspirations simply for living with a disability.
- Think about whether referring to a person's disability is relevant (in most cases it won't be).
- Person-first language (people with disability) and identity-first language (disabled people) are both used in Australia. People with disability often have strong preferences for one term or the other, so it is best to follow the lead of the person or group you are talking about. It's okay to ask.
- Avoid using language which trivialises others and their experiences.
- There are some derogatory words for people with disability which originally had medical origins but does not justify their use and are incredibly disrespectful. Words such as 'retard', 'moron', 'drongo', 'cretin', 'Mongol' and 'idiot' are incredibly offensive.
- When meeting someone who uses a wheelchair, you should choose a location where you can sit down too to be at the same level as that person.

Responding to non-inclusive language

The best way to set expectations about inclusive language is to address any non-inclusive language directly when it occurs. It is important that we focus on correcting our own missteps more than we do other people's.

For example, you may choose to:

- Call out the language or behaviour - avoid name-calling (e.g. calling someone ableist).
- Appeal to the person's better side - *"that doesn't sound like you to say that"* .
- Take the person aside at a later moment and explain why the language was non-inclusive.

It is important to remember in the workplace that what may be funny to one person can be offensive or upsetting to another. Comments intended as a joke can be a form of harassment or discriminatory behaviour, therefore any jokes that are demeaning to demographics of people or characteristics are best avoided.

Remember:

- Getting called out doesn't mean you need to defend yourself – apologise and move on. Trivialising someone else's feelings does not help build inclusion.
- Instead of trying to defend or excuse your actions, try focusing on understanding the other persons perspective.
- If you are confused by their reaction, you could ask, *"Could you explain why what I said was wrong?"*.

Support

If you would like more information on inclusive language for disability inclusion, AGAA recommends:

- Diversity Council Australia (DCA) - https://www.dca.org.au/
- People with Disability Australia - https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AIA-Inclusive-Language-and-Events-Guide-3.pdf