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The APS Neurodiversity Community of Practice: Addressing psychological and psychosocial safety at work in the APS

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Abstract

The Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice (CoP) was launched in 2022 to address a critical gap in workforce inclusivity in the Australian Public Sector. Despite growing recognition of the importance of inclusivity and psychosocial safety in the workplace, the public sector faces significant challenges in adequately supporting neurodivergent employees. This gap not only affects the well-being and productivity of neurodivergent individuals but also limits the potential for innovation and hampers productivity. There is an urgent need to develop and implement strategies that foster an inclusive environment, enhance awareness, and build capabilities to support neurodivergent employees. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating safe workplaces that value diversity, promote equity, and maximise the potential of all public sector employees.

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Championing neurodiversity, this case study explores what the Australian Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice has achieved in its first two and a half years of operation and the way in which Communities of Practice can work to enable inter-agency collaboration, sharing and support. The CoP, led by co-chairs Robin Edmonds PSM, Corrina Evans, now connects a diverse group of over 1400 members from 189 federal, state and territory government agencies. The CoP's co-founders Robin Edmonds PSM and Andrew Pfeiffer PSM (former co-chair) were recognised by the Governor-General in June 2025, with each receiving a Public Service Medal (PSM) for outstanding public service. The case study also offers recommendations for creating a neurodiversity-safe workplace.

ANZSOG Development Statement

This case study was made possible through the generous input, guidance, and support of co-chairs Robin Edmonds, and Corrina Evans. Their collective expertise, strategic perspectives, and commitment to fostering meaningful collaboration were instrumental throughout the development process, shaping both the substance and the direction of the final work.

Disclaimer

This case study includes personal opinions and perspectives that reflect the views of the individuals involved. These opinions do not necessarily represent the views of any organisation or entity.

AI Disclaimer

The research for this case study was conducted with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools, ChatGPT and Copilot. These tools were used to identify relevant source materials and analyse text.

Introduction

The Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice (CoP) is a volunteer-led, cross-jurisdictional community focused on improving neurodiversity inclusion across the public sector.¹ The CoP serves not only as a strategic voice for systemic change, by connecting initiatives and subject matter experts across the sector, but also as a safe, peer-led community for neurodivergent people to connect, share experiences, and feel seen, valued, and supported in their careers.

The CoP, led by co-chairs Robin Edmonds PSM and Corrina Evans, now connects a diverse group of over 1400 members from 189 federal, state and territory government agencies. The CoP's co-founders Robin Edmonds PSM and Andrew Pfeiffer PSM (former co-chair) were recognised by the Governor-General in June 2025, with each receiving a Public Service Medal (PSM) for outstanding public service. The CoP successfully advocated for the inclusion of a Neurodiversity question in the APS Employee Census as of 2023, a foundational step towards visibility and evidence-based change.

The CoP is championed by Dr Antonio Di Dio, long-term GP and Director of the Professional Services Review. Antonio is passionate about reducing burnout and he has a goal to talk to 10,000 public servants over 100 talks to help make the public sector the kindest, most inclusive, and respectful workplace in the country.²

About the Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice

The CoP is led by a passionate steering committee with lived experience and deep expertise, with input from our SES advisors and CoP Champion Dr Antonio Di Dio. The CoP Steering Committee is driven by a shared sense of stewardship to improve workplace culture and systems where our diverse employees can perform at their best. The

¹ Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice (2024). Available via APSC website: Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice | Australian Public Service Commission

² IPAA (2024). Running on empty? Burnout in the public sector with Dr Antonio Di Dio, available via: Running on empty? Burnout in the public sector with Dr Antonio Di Dio - Institute of Public Administration Australia (ACT) Limited | Institute of Public Administration Australia (ACT) Limited

CoP aims drive neurodiversity inclusion, to ensure the public sector can deliver better outcomes by representing the community we serve. The CoP does this by:

- Working collaboratively with expert line areas, agency leads, and corporate members to help share resources and initiatives, provide opportunities for consultation, and assist with coordinating feedback from the community.
- Providing a safe, peer-led community of practice for neurodivergent staff, allies, and professional enabling areas.
- Working with senior leaders within the sector to inform strategies meaningful strategic and cultural change.

Key Achievements

The CoP effects change through several pathways, including by developing and modelling sustainable leadership pathways to create opportunities for more neurodivergent people to step into visible leadership roles through our steering committee and leadership team. The CoP regularly host events that share information, promote awareness and raise understanding, and create connections.

The CoP launched a GovTEAMS³ community to facilitate collaboration on neurodiversity inclusion, allowing sharing of resources, initiatives, and consultation opportunities across the public sector. Some of the resources shared with the community include Robin's inclusive conversation guide about preferred working styles, lists of adjustments at work and in recruitment processes, and information about cross-agency events.

The CoP has also led significant community engagement to improve outcomes for the public sector, such as:

- Established the 'Public Sector Neurodiversity Excellence Awards' to recognise neurodiversity inclusion initiatives across the sector, with the inaugural awards presented by Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance, Women, the Public Service and Government Services.
- Coordinated consultation with Autistic members of the APS on Australia's inaugural National Autism Strategy 2025-2031 and provided consolidated feedback that was incorporated into the recommendations of the First Action Plan 2025-2026.

What is neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity can be understood as a framework that encompasses the range of difference in brain function from neurotypical to neurodivergent. Meanwhile, **neurodivergent** is a term used to describe the individual. Neurodivergence includes variations, or **neurotypes**, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia (See Appendix One for a glossary of key terms).

These differences vary in how they manifest and can range from subtle to more pronounced. It is common for two or more conditions to co-occur, and presentation may change over time and in different contexts. Broadly speaking, neurodivergence impacts the way individuals perceive, process, and respond to information or stimuli, which affects the way they operate in the world. This, in turn, can have consequences for an individual's social, emotional, financial, and physical wellbeing. For example, neurodivergent individuals disproportionately face unemployment and underemployment compared to the general population (Buckland, 2024, The Select Committee on Autism, 2022, Senate Standing Committee of Community Affairs, 2023). In 2018, the ABS reported that amongst people living with autism spectrum disorders:

- The labour force participation rate was 38.0% among the 94,600 people of working age (15-64 years) with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). This is compared with 53.4% of all working age people with disability and 84.1% of people without disability.

³ GovTEAMS is an online platform that enables public sector employees to collaborate and share resources.

- The unemployment rate for people with ASDs was 34.1%, more than three times the rate for people with disability (10.3%) and almost eight times the rate of people without disability (4.6%).⁴

Neurodivergent individuals, however, often go unnoticed and/or undiagnosed due to “masking”. In the context of neurodiversity, this refers to the practice of hiding or suppressing one's natural behaviours, thoughts, and expressions to conform to societal expectations or to blend in with neurotypical individuals. As such, many people are surprised to learn that neurodivergence is relatively prevalent. In 2022, the ABS reported that there is an estimated 9.4% of Australians with psychological development, behavioural, cognitive and emotional conditions - a figure that had risen from 6.9% in 2018, likely due to increased community awareness, testing, and diagnosis. In addition to this, anxiety disorders, for the same period, are at 7.4%, which is an increase from 6.1% in 2018.⁵

Intersectionality

Another dimension that is critical to any conversation about neurodiversity was intersectionality. Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how various aspects of a person's identity intersect and interact, shaping their lived experiences and influencing how they navigate the world (Botha and Gillespie-Lynch, 2022, Krzeminska et al., 2019). These aspects can include cultural and linguistic diversity (CALD), gender, sexuality, class, disability, and neurocognitive differences. An intersectional approach emphasises that:

- No identity category is a monolith. There is diversity within each group, and a person's experience is shaped by the unique intersections of their various identities.
- Oppressions can be cumulative. When different forms of discrimination or marginalisation intersect, the resulting challenges and barriers can be amplified.

Understanding individual circumstances requires the consideration of all intersecting factors. A comprehensive understanding of a person's needs and challenges includes how their neurodiversity interacts with other aspects of their identity (see: Botha and Gillespie-Lynch 2022 and Mallipeddi and VanDaalen 2022).⁶

Workplace support should not be dependent on a formal diagnosis. Access to a diagnosis can be invaluable, as it provides many neurodivergent people with shared language, confidence and the self-understanding needed to advocate for and navigate rigid compliance systems, such as requesting workplace adjustments. However, relying on formal diagnosis as a gateway to support creates barriers and inequities. Accessing a diagnosis is not available to many members of the community due to systemic bias and availability of or affording specialist medical care. Many specialists do not accept new patients, and the assessment process can cost thousands of dollars over multiple years. However, increased community dialogue about neurodiversity is equipping more people with the language for self-advocacy and contributing to greater awareness

Legislation, regulation and psychosocial safety

Legislation relating to discrimination, fair work and workplace health and safety define the rights and responsibilities of both employees and employers, to ensure equitable treatment across diverse demographics. These regulatory measures serve to operationalise and embed principles of psychosocial safety within organisational practices to mitigate workplace stressors and promote employee well-being. Effective implementation of these policies not only

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). Disability, Aging and Carers, Australia: Summary of findings, available via: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release#key-statistics>, accessed May 2024. Note: the 2024 data on Autism has not yet been fully released.

⁵ ABS, 2024, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Finding 2022, available via: [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release#key-statistics)

⁶ An understanding of intersectionality reveals how various identities, like CALD, gender, sexuality, and class, intertwine with neurodiversity to shape unique experiences. For example, Black autistic individuals face distinct barriers to accessing diagnosis and support (Jones and Mandell, 2020). In another example, ADHD research has primarily been focused on boys and how ADHD typically presents in boys. Yet, recent studies have shown that ADHD can present very differently in girls. This has meant that girls and women are significantly less likely to be diagnosed and treated for ADHD-related symptoms than men (Slobodin and Davidovitch, 2019).

enhances organisational compliance but also cultivates working environments that are safe and conducive to productivity and innovation.

In Australia, employers, including in the public sector, have a responsibility to provide a safe work environment for their employees. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (DDA) defines disability broadly, encompassing neurodiversity, and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability, including in access to employment. The DDA further requires employers to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of individuals with a disability. *The Fair Work Act 2009* also includes provisions against discrimination. In this context, the legal and policy framework can be invoked to protect neurodivergent employees from discrimination.

The *Model Work Health and Safety Regulations* (WHS regulations) further outline the duties employers must protect employees from psychosocial hazards, which requires them to take reasonable steps to identify, assess, and control risks (Safe Work Australia, 2022). The WHS regulations, as part of a broader framework established by the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011*, outlines obligations for ensuring health, safety and welfare in the workplace, and this extends to all staff members, including those with disabilities. Some of the ways in which this is done, and which can be specifically related to neurodivergent employees, include:

- Creating a safe work environment, this includes both physical (for example ergonomic workstations, noise cancelling headphones) and psychological safety (minimising stress).
- Risk assessment and management, which requires employers to identify and assess workplace hazards, and this extends to incorporate the different needs of neurodivergent staff.
- Consulting with workers on health and safety matters to understand and address specific concerns and to ensure that these concerns are factored into the development of safety policies and procedures.
- Workplace adjustments to ensure the effective participation of all staff members, which may include physical changes to the work area and workplace, access to equipment or services, or changes to work methods and tasks.⁷

There is an onus of responsibility for both managers and staff understand and meet their responsibilities for effective management of safe workplaces. Yet, in practice, Robin noted ongoing inconsistencies and gaps in both understanding and implementation of the legislated frameworks, resulting in ongoing discrimination and unsafe working conditions for neurodivergent individuals.

National Autism Strategy 2025-2031

The [National Autism Strategy 2025-2031](#) and [National Autism Strategy First Action Plan 2025-2026](#) have been developed through a comprehensive co-design process. The strategy sets out the vision for a safe and inclusive society for all Autistic people. One where we support and empower Autistic people to thrive, in all aspects of life. This is in line with international human rights.

The strategy is a framework for improving outcomes for all Autistic people in the years ahead. It includes a vision, goal and guiding principles. The strategy focuses on actions and enabling change in four key outcome areas:

- social inclusion
- economic inclusion
- diagnosis, services and supports
- health and mental health via the [National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People \(Opens external website\)](#) (the Autism Health Roadmap).

Each outcome area covers a broad range of issues. The strategy includes commitments under the first three outcome areas. The Autism Health Roadmap will address the fourth key outcome area, to improve health and mental health. The Department of Health and Aged Care leads the development of the Autism Health Roadmap. This is through a separate process, connected to the strategy.

⁷ Job Access (2025). Guidelines on reasonable adjustments, available via: <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/i-am-an-employer/know-rights-responsibilities/guidelines-reasonable-adjustment>

Neurodiversity in the APS

The CoP successfully campaigned for the inclusion of a neurodiversity question in the APS Employee Census for 2023, with inaugural results published on the APSC website.⁸ This data was ground-breaking for the APS. It offered agencies the opportunity to better understand their workforces and the views and experiences of neurodivergent employees.

Results for the APS overall were reported in the State of the Service Report 2022-23 and in other public reporting. This reporting helped raised awareness of the diversity present in the APS workforce. Following analysis of results in the first year, the APSC worked with the CoP on a revised question used in 2024, which offered further information on where greater education might be necessary around what neurodivergence is and what it constitutes. Agencies could see the proportion who admitted having no knowledge of what neurodivergence was and target initiatives appropriately.

The 2024 APS employee census found that 8.8% of APS employees identified as neurodivergent, with a further 9.3% of respondents considered that they may be neurodivergent, and 9.5% of respondents said they were unsure what neurodivergent means.⁹ However, data on neurodivergence in the APS relies on self-reporting and not all neurodivergent individuals feel comfortable disclosing their status due to fears of stigmatisation. As a result, the census may not necessarily present an accurate picture of neurodivergence in the APS.

Those at the APS who identified as neurodivergent tended to be younger, work at lower classification levels, and were often employed in policy, data/research, ICT, or communications/marketing roles. They also reported lower satisfaction with workplace support, respect, and inclusion, as well as higher perceptions of discrimination and bullying (APSC, 2023). The data also showed an overlap between individuals who identified as neurodivergent and other diversity groups, such as people with disabilities, First Nations people, and LGBTIQ+ individuals. This highlights that neurodivergent employees may belong to multiple diverse groups, which can amplify the stigma and challenges they experience.

These results, discussed above, are a critical step forward in understanding neurodiversity in the APS and provide vital information that will enable the APS to better support its neurodivergent staff, while supporting them to unlock their full potential.

The need for change

Despite the increasing momentum of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives across the public sector, neurodivergent individuals continue to be overlooked, resulting in critical missed opportunities for both employees and employers. Aside from the issue of securing ongoing employment, neurodivergent employees in the workplace face additional stressors and challenges. Working environments where the psychological and psychosocial safety of neurodivergent individuals are not met can create ongoing physiological and psychological stress that often leads to burnout, absenteeism, and other systemic issues. Coping strategies like masking, which may in the short term helps neurodivergent employees navigate social situations or avoid judgement, can quickly lead to stress, anxiety, and burnout (Kidwell et al. 2023).

The main challenges faced by neurodivergent individuals in the workplace that have an impact on both psychological and psychosocial safety are:

- A lack of understanding and awareness of neurodiversity
- Stigma and discrimination, lack of safety to disclose diagnosis
- Limits and barriers to career development opportunities
- Limited awareness of and access to support and resources

⁸ Understanding Neurodiversity in the APS, available via: [Understanding neurodiversity in the APS | Australian Public Service Commission \(apsc.gov.au\)](#) Employee Census, available via: [The 2023 APS Employee Census Overall Results | Australian Public Service Commission \(apsc.gov.au\)](#)

⁹ APSC (2024), Understanding Neurodiversity in the APS, available via: [Appendix 2—State of the Service additional data | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

Lack of awareness amongst line managers of their legislated responsibilities means psychological safety of neurodivergent staff is often reliant on chance. That is, the chance of having a manager who understands the regulatory context coupled with the capabilities required to manage a diverse team. This is further exacerbated by the complexities of neurodiversity and the reality that neurodivergent individuals do not form a single homogenous group – but are instead a diverse range of individuals who vary widely (Russo et al. 2020).

The case for inclusion

In the early 2020s, the field of research into neurodiversity at work was still in an emergent state. Nonetheless, there was broad support for the idea that a neurodiverse workforce creates benefits and opportunities for both individuals and organisations (Bruyere and Colella 2022, Khan et al 2023, Krzeminska et al. 2019, Deloitte, 2020). From creative solutions to problem-solving, neurodivergent minds can enrich agencies with diverse skills and fresh perspectives. This is understood to foster not only stronger team dynamics, but also fairer representation and a competitive edge in attracting top talent.

Beyond attracting the best people for the job, supporting neurodivergent employees is a critical step towards creating psychologically and psychosocially safe workplaces for all employees. Workplace cultures that value and respect all individuals lead to higher job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and improved overall performance¹⁰. An approach that includes neurodiversity would strengthen the APS's ability to serve the diverse Australian population effectively, equitably and innovatively. As previous APS Commissioner, Mr Peter Woolcott AO, stated in the inaugural APS Diversity and Inclusion report 2022¹¹: 'We have a responsibility to create a workforce that represents and best serves the Australian community'.

Why set up a Community of Practice?

The CoP was established to bring together people across the public sector who share a commitment to advancing neurodiversity inclusion in government workplaces. It creates a shared space for collaboration, knowledge exchange and collective action, uniting policy teams, practitioners, HR professionals and senior leaders who are working to build safer, fairer, and more inclusive systems.

The CoP was formed in response to growing recognition that more coordinated, inclusive, and consistent action is needed to embed neurodiversity inclusion across the public sector. Rather than operating in silos, the CoP enables agencies and individuals to learn from each other, amplify what works, and co-create solutions to common challenges. It supports the sharing of lived experiences, and evidence informed approaches to improve outcomes for neurodivergent employees and the broader workforce.

The CoP does not represent any one agency or voice, it reflects a broad community working together towards a common goal of embedding neurodiversity inclusion into the way that we design policy, deliver services and support neurodivergent people to thrive.

Bringing the community together

The CoP has enabled various agencies, departments and networks to share the effort of leading in this space, creating momentum for visible and sustainable change so that this advocacy work is not reliant on individuals. Another key aspect of the CoP, aside from being a forum for collaboration and sharing experiences and resources, is that it serves as a channel for corporate areas to seek consultation and access relevant community-informed information and resources.

Along with the challenges of being neurodivergent in the workplace, neurodivergent employees are often wearing the additional burden of advocacy, and self-advocacy, outside of their substantive roles. A Community of Practice enables members of the community to share resources and information on advocacy efforts, collaborate on learning and implementation of best practice, and raise awareness of neurodiversity inclusion across the public sector.

¹⁰ Deloitte (2022). A rising tide lifts all boats, available via: <https://www.deloitte.com/au/en/our-thinking/insights/topics/talent/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace.html>, accessed May 2024.

¹¹ Australian Public Service Commission, (2022). Diversity and inclusion report, available via <https://www.apsc.gov.au/working-aps/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-and-inclusion-report-2022>

The CoP has been featured in podcasts, webinars, and articles, highlighting the importance of neurodiversity inclusion in the public sector. These have included appearances on the Institute of Public Administration's (IPAA) Work with Purpose Podcast,^{12,13} the Public Sector Disability Leadership and Allyship Summit, and the APS Gradcast¹⁴. The CoP was also featured in the 2023 State of the Service Report which is the government's most reputable publication on the state of the public sector, signalling the shift towards greater inclusivity in the APS.

Critical workforce gaps

Despite the enthusiasm and the wins to date, the CoP have faced some significant challenges in setting up and running the organisation. The biggest issues are the lack of resources, absence of funding and formalised support. The CoP is run by Robin, Corrina and the steering committee in a volunteer capacity, in addition to their substantive roles. While some members of the community have supportive managers who accommodate the workload of corporate contributions, for many their advocacy work is on top of a full-time workload or done outside of work hours.

A significant problem that Robin has identified is that organisational commitment to inclusivity can be "top heavy". Meaning that while senior executives are supportive of the idea of inclusivity in principle, this enthusiasm is not translated into practical supports for middle management and their teams. They argued that without embedding structural supports for inclusion, those with lived experience often shoulder the burden of building communities and self-advocating, increasing the risk of burnout.

Manager Capability: Creating safe teams

There is a significant amount of work required to embed support within organisations across the public sector to set neurodivergent employees up for long term success. One area that has consistently been identified as a priority in the community is the need to improve manager capability. The CoP highlights the importance of shifting the approach from what happens "if" you work with a neurodivergent staff member, to understanding that you already have a neurodiverse team. This perspective reinforces the importance of designing inclusive systems and cultures that support the diversity of all minds present in our workplace.

In this context, one of the most important steps forward is on broadening understanding of the regulatory context, ensuring managers firstly understand their responsibilities and secondly that they are provided the training and support required to manage increasingly diverse teams.

Managers play a pivotal role in creating a safe and supportive workplace for neurodivergent employees and the CoP provides some guidance on the kinds of capabilities needed to do this.

- Managers need to practice empathy, active listening, and demonstrate adaptability while providing clear communication and solving problems effectively.
- Managers should advocate for inclusivity by addressing biases, removing barriers, and ensuring necessary accommodations are available.
- Managers need to recognize how neurodivergent employees may experience workplace interactions differently and handle conflicts with sensitivity.

In addition, flexibility and adaptability are essential for managers to meet the diverse needs of their teams, while conflict resolution skills, including listening to varied viewpoints and practicing empathy, help foster constructive

¹² IPAA (2023) 'Embracing neurodiversity in the public sector' - Institute of Public Administration Australia (ACT) Limited | [Institute of Public Administration Australia \(ACT\) Limited \(ipaa.org.au\)](https://www.ipaa.org.au)

¹³ IPAA (2024). 'Own it': Empowering neuro-affirming workstyles and environments with Joey Ballantyne, available via Work with Purpose website: ['Own it': Empowering neuro-affirming workstyles and environments with Joey Ballantyne - Institute of Public Administration Australia \(ACT\) Limited | Institute of Public Administration Australia \(ACT\) Limited](https://www.workwithpurpose.gov.au/own-it)

¹⁴ APS Gradcast, episode 22, available via: [Episode #22 – Neurodiversity in the APS Workforce – Gradcast](https://www.aps.gov.au/gradcast/episode-22)

solutions. Managers should model inclusive behaviour in their interactions and decisions, setting a positive tone for the team.¹⁵

Regular feedback is key to understanding what works and identifying areas for improvement, and managers must avoid making assumptions about their staff's needs, recognizing that each neurodivergent individual is unique, as Stephen Shore famously stated: "If you've met one neurodivergent person, you've met one neurodivergent person" (cited in Flannery and Wisner-Carlson, 2020).

Structural supports

A truly inclusive culture requires having neurodivergent individuals in senior leadership roles and managers who champion diversity through action, not just policy. Without this, even well-intentioned initiatives like RecruitAbility¹⁶ or the Aurora Neuroinclusion Program¹⁷ and other affirmative measures will fall short, as neurodivergent staff may still feel unsupported and leave. In this sense it is critical to develop an understanding of neurodiversity as central to supporting individual career opportunities, which can in turn will increase representation and diversity across the ranks. And while RecruitAbility can be applied to vacancies at any level, including senior executive roles, there is little available information as to how this has been applied and what its impact has been in terms of increased representation within the service.

Next steps

The CoP have identified some critical frameworks that agencies can build on to create a more inclusive environment not just for neurodivergent employees, but for all their employees.

- **Accessibility** should be integrated into every aspect of the workplace, ensuring that everyone has what they need to fully participate at work. This includes digital accessibility and designing inclusive physical spaces, providing flexible work options, and ensuring that digital tools are user-friendly for people with disabilities. By making accessibility the default, rather than an accommodation, barriers are removed, empowering all employees to succeed and self-advocate.
- Agencies should foster **psychological and psychosocial safety** in the workplace by developing a culture that values neurodiversity, strengthens manager capability to support diverse teams, and embeds organisation-wide understanding to remove systemic barriers, enabling all staff to feel safe, respected and set up for long term success.
- Agencies should support their employees **throughout the employment lifecycle**, with greater attention to retention strategies and career progression alongside practical supports to enable the development of emerging leaders. Organisations should better support staff and managers to understand neurodiversity and strategies for reducing bias at all stages of employment. Ongoing support is essential to setting neurodivergent employees up for long-term success and to empower them to thrive in the workplace.

Conclusion

The CoP has made considerable progress in uniting a diverse range of employees and driving towards a more inclusive public sector. However, there is a great distance yet to travel as many neurodivergent employees remain in vulnerable positions, experiencing burnout, exclusion, and job insecurity.

¹⁵ Work on building manager capabilities can be found: [Managing a neurodiverse workforce | APS \(psychology.org.au\)](#), [IncludeAbility - Employer resources Australian Human Rights Commission](#), [Disability employment - Creating workplaces for everyone Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

¹⁶ RecruitAbility, is a scheme to support people with a disability seek employment in the public sector [RecruitAbility | Australian Public Service Commission \(apsc.gov.au\)](#)

¹⁷ Aurora Neuroinclusion Program is designed to help people with ADHD and Autism start a career in the APS, [Aurora Neuroinclusion Program - About us - Services Australia](#)

To better support neurodivergent staff in the public sector, the CoP suggests that the APS ensure that organisations that are already addressing these issues are backed with appropriate resources and support. They also noted that individuals can take meaningful steps towards making the APS an inclusive and safe place to work by supporting organisations like the CoP and taking the time to engage with their work, research and advocacy. This commitment not only uplifts neurodivergent employees but also strengthens the public sector's overall diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Ensuring psychosocial and psychological safety in the workplace requires collective effort. By working together at all levels of an organisation, the CoP believes that it is possible to create an environment where individuals feel safe, valued, and empowered to perform their best. However, it is crucial not to place the burden of advocacy solely on neurodivergent employees who may already be facing higher levels of burnout, stress, and anxiety. Instead, they see collaboration among colleagues on inclusion and diversity as the key to building safer, healthier workplaces for everyone.

Feedback on case use

To assist with continual improvement, if you've used this case, we'd greatly appreciate your feedback and suggestions for improvement. To do so, please email caselibrary@anzsog.edu.au with the name of the case and your comments. Many thanks in advance.

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APPENDIX 1: Glossary

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterised by persistent patterns of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity that interfere with functioning or development. ADHD typically presents in childhood, but it can continue into adolescence and adulthood. There are three key types of ADHD, these are predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive or a combine type.

Autism

Autism, or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a developmental condition that affects how a person perceives the world and interacts with others. It is characterised by differences in social communication and interaction, as well as the presence of restricted or repetitive behaviours, interests, or activities. Autism is called a "spectrum" because it encompasses a wide range of symptoms, skills, and levels of impairment or disability.

People with autism may have challenges in understanding social cues, developing typical language skills, or adapting to changes in routine, but the severity and combination of these challenges can vary greatly. Some individuals with autism might have significant intellectual disabilities, while others may have average or above-average intelligence. Many people on the autism spectrum have strong attention to detail and may excel in specific areas of interest.

Disability

Disability refers to a broad range of conditions that affect a person's physical, mental, or sensory abilities. It is typically characterised by limitations in performing everyday activities or participating in various aspects of life due to impairments.

In many legal and social contexts, disability is defined not just by the condition itself but also by how it interacts with the environment and societal barriers.

Dyspraxia

Dyspraxia, also known as Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD), is a neurological condition that affects motor coordination and planning. Individuals with dyspraxia have difficulty with movement and coordination, which can impact everyday activities, academic performance, and even speech. It is a lifelong condition, though symptoms may change over time.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that primarily affects a person's ability to read, write, and spell. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding skills, and difficulties with spelling, despite normal intelligence and adequate instruction. Dyslexia is a neurological condition that affects how the brain processes language, particularly the ability to connect letters with sounds and to recognize words quickly.

Microaggression

A microaggression is a subtle, often unintentional, action or comment that conveys prejudice or discrimination toward a marginalised group. While these actions or remarks may seem small or insignificant, they can reinforce stereotypes or signal exclusion, causing harm over time. Microaggressions can be based on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or other aspects of a person's identity.

Neurodivergent

Neurodivergent refers to individuals whose brain functions, processes, or learns in ways that differ from what is typically considered "neurotypical". This term is often used to describe people with conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or other neurological variation.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity embraces the wide spectrum of human experience, recognising that individuals perceive, learn, and interact with the world in diverse ways. This includes labels like autism, ADHD, Tourette's, and dyslexia, which are all considered normal variations in brain function. Rather than a singular definition, neurodiversity serves as a framework for respecting our inherent differences, providing a lens for analysing societal issues, and advocating for a world that celebrates and fosters the richness of human diversity.

Neurotype

Neurotype is the unique way an individual's brain processes information, experiences, and interacts with the world. It encompasses the diversity of brain functioning across all people, whether neurodivergent (e.g., autism, ADHD, dyslexia) or neurotypical.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety, as a component of psychosocial safety, refers to the individual and whether the individual feels safe to speak up and advocate for themselves without fear of repercussions.

Psychosocial Safety

Psychosocial safety is a broad term and refers to the interaction between psychological well-being, social well-being and subjective (perceived) well-being.

Sensory Processing Disorder

Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) is a condition where the brain has difficulty receiving and responding to information that comes in through the senses. People with SPD might be over- or under-sensitive to sensory inputs such as touch, sound, light, taste, or smell. This can affect their ability to function in everyday life, leading to difficulties in activities like dressing, eating, or interacting with others. SPD is often discussed in the context of developmental disorders like autism, but it can occur on its own or alongside other conditions.

Tourette Syndrome

Tourette Syndrome (TS) is a neurological disorder characterized by repetitive, involuntary movements and vocalisations called tics. Tics can be motor (e.g., blinking, head jerking) or vocal (e.g., grunting, throat clearing). The severity and type of tics can vary widely among individuals.

APPENDIX 2: Tools and Resources

Australian Human Rights Commission: [Disability employment - Creating workplaces for everyone Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

Australian Human Rights Commission: [IncludeAbility - Employer resources Australian Human Rights Commission](#)

Australian Public Service Commission: Reasonable Adjustment Policy: [APSC reasonable adjustment policy | Australian Public Service Commission](#)

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Boston University Diversity & Inclusion (BU D&I): [Ability and Neurodiversity | Diversity & Inclusion \(bu.edu\)](#)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Neuroinclusion at work: [Neuroinclusion at work | CIPD](#)

Neurodiversity in Business: [Home - Neurodiversity in Business](#)

The Neurodiverse Safe Work Initiative: <https://neurodiversesafework.com.au/>

Neurodiversity Hub: [Neurodiversity Resources For Employers — Neurodiversity Hub](#)

University of Queensland, Embracing Neurodiversity: [Embracing neurodiversity: 6 ways to support employees and colleagues \(uq.edu.au\)](#)

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