I acknowledge and give my genuine respect to the enduring strength and vitality of First Nations culture and their connection to Country, to each other, and to the rich tapestry of traditions that define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the country, seas, and skies across Australia.

I give my respect to Elders past, present, and emerging.

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Neurodiverging

An introduction to neurodiversity in the workplace

Divergence:
noun
A variation that deviates from the standard or norm

Synonyms: departure, deviation, **difference**

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Executive Functioning Leadership

Transform Your Workforce with Neurodiversity-Inclusive Practices. Embrace diverse talents to drive innovation, enhance performance, and create lasting impact. Executive Functioning Leadership (EFL) empowers organisations to build inclusive, high-performing environments where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

Through professional coaching, tailored organisational change strategies, and comprehensive education packages, we help organisations unlock the full potential of diverse teams. We are committed to driving lasting cultural transformation by fostering neurodiversity awareness, enhancing leadership effectiveness, and creating workplaces that celebrate everyone's unique strengths.

By combining professional expertise with lived experience, we strive to create a world where neurodivergent people are valued, supported, and empowered to lead with confidence and success.

DIRECTOR PROFILE

Callie Elward-Barrett

Callie has been a senior leader in public service, non-profit, and private sectors.

She actively promotes and models inclusive work practices for neurodivergent staff. She educates on the role of leaders in creating practices that enable NDers to succeed and harnessing the incredible strengths diverse approaches bring to delivering better policy and programs.

She established and Chaired the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care's Neurodiversity Network, was a founding member of the Public Sector Neurodiversity Community of Practice and was a senior executive signatory for changes to the Australian Public Service (APS) Census that saw foundational data collection on neurodivergence in the APS.

Callie identifies as having lived experience with disability, and as the parent of a child with disability.

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What is Neurodiversity

- ‘Neurodiversity’ is a term that has grown significantly in public awareness over the last 5-10 years, with many well-known public figures choosing to share being diagnosed with conditions such as ADHD, Autism, or Dyslexia (among others).
- It is often misunderstood, with a high level or prejudice, bias, and stereotyping applied to people who identify as neurodivergent, along with a misperception that it is becoming more prevalent, or ‘popular’.
- ‘Neurodiverse’ and ‘Neurodivergent’ are not medical diagnoses in themselves, they are identity terms that arose as an alternative to deficit and disorder-based language.
- A 2020 study estimates that one in five to seven (or 15-20 per cent) of the global population is neurodivergent, and a 2022 study estimates that 11% of Australian employees are neurodivergent.
- In Australia, many neurodivergent diagnoses fall under the protection of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), so it is important to be aware of rights and obligations under this Act. Including around disclosure of diagnoses to an employer.
- Not all Neurodivergent (ND) people consider themselves to have disability, whereas some people experience their neurodivergence as very disabling, especially in the workplace.
- Neurodivergent people are often overrepresented in workplace performance management and bullying statistics (Census).

‘Neurodiversity’: (Judy Singer, Australian sociologist, 1998)
Refers to differences in brain function and behavioural traits, as part of normal variation in human populations. There is no ‘right’ brain. Societies are all neurodiverse.

*Singer is credited with the specific word, following several years of discourse around neurological differences in the Autism community

‘Neurodivergent’: (Kassiane Asasumasu, 1999)
Refers to an individual who has mental or neurological functions (their neurotype), which means their brain processes information in ways that differ from what is considered ‘typical’.

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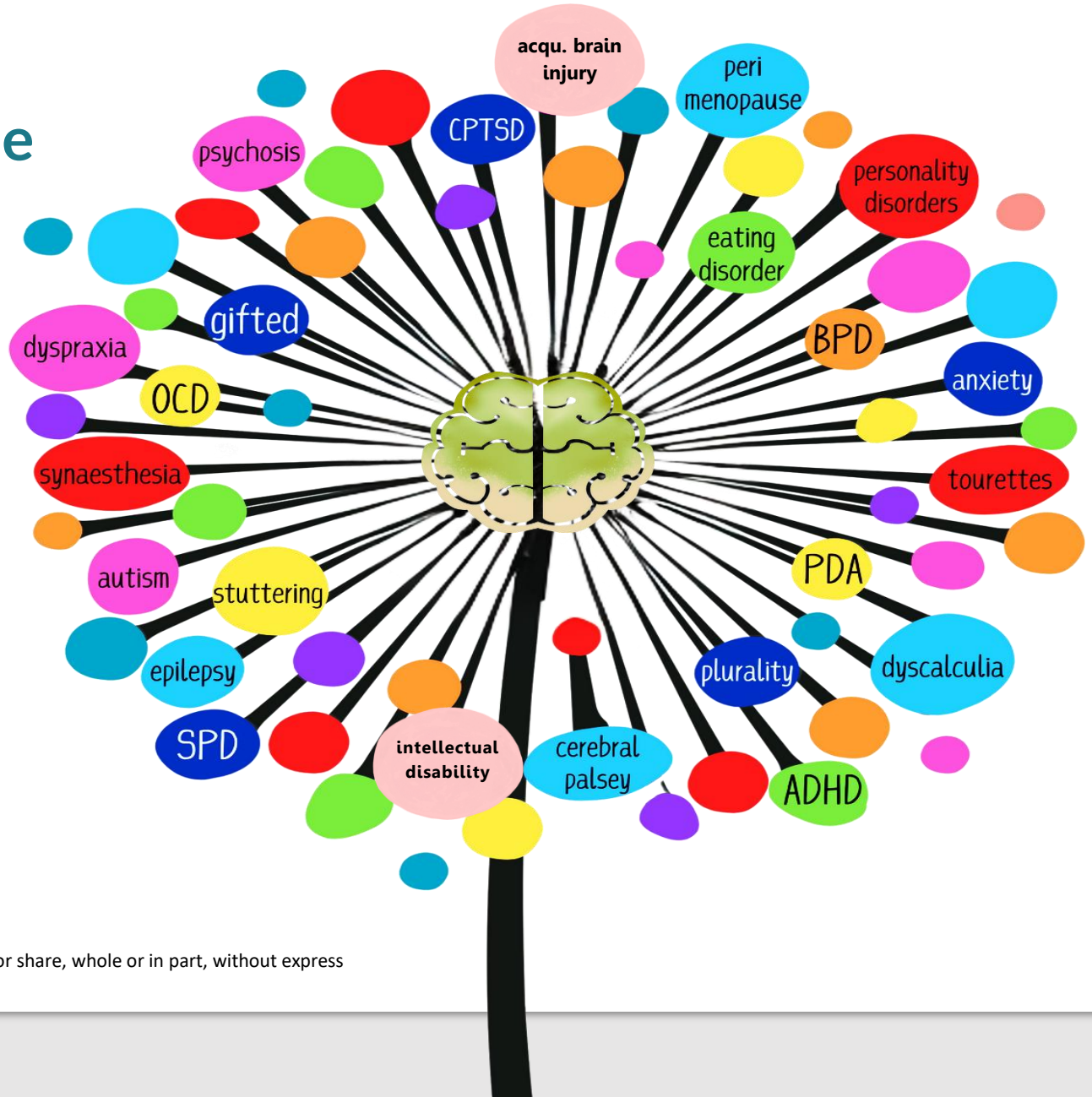
Types of Neurodivergence



*This is not an exhaustive list. It consistently changes as new research and knowledge is developed.

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Superpower or Disability?

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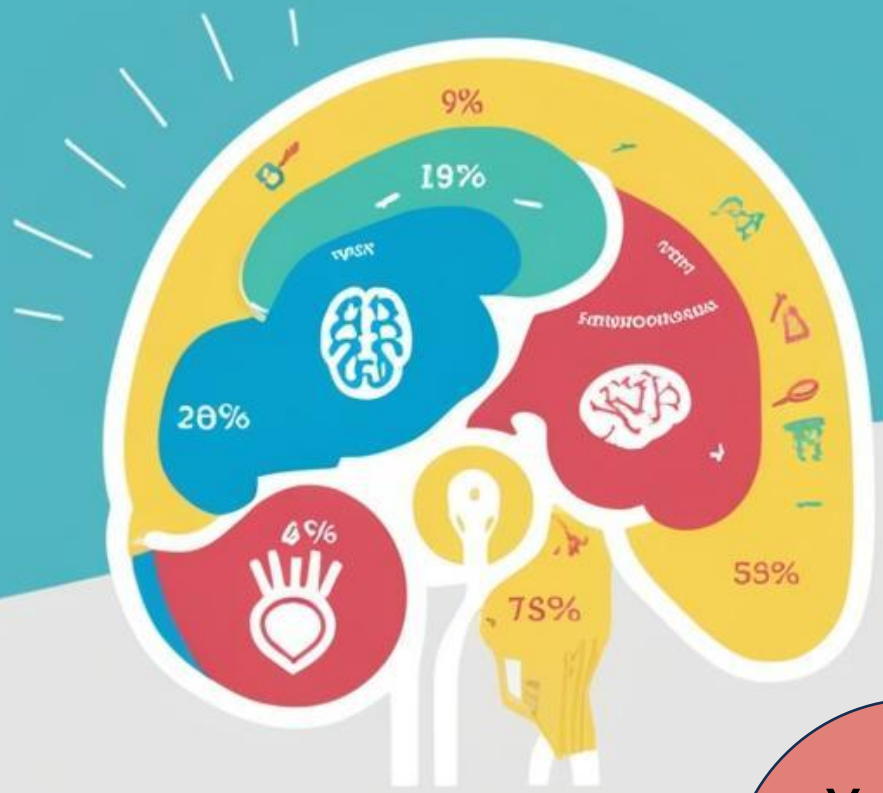
DEBUNKING NEURODIVERGENCE MYTHS



Everyone's getting diagnosed lately

Aren't we all on the spectrum anyway?

I can tell if someone is autistic/ ADHD

You just want to get the 'good meds'

You just want the benefits

It's bad parenting and poor discipline

All xxx are...

You're an adult... TRY HARDER

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Workplace Neurodiversity Statistics

Neurodivergent employees can enhance productivity by up to 30%.

(JP Morgan's Autism at Work study, 2023)

Companies with diverse talent report a 19% increase in innovation revenue.

(Boston Consulting Group, 2018)

Companies with inclusive and diverse cultures are twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing and six times as likely to be innovative and agile.

(Deloitte, 2018)

And yet
Half of surveyed leaders and managers said they would be uncomfortable hiring someone with one or more neurodivergent conditions

(Institute of Leadership and Management, 2020)

Labour force participation rate is 38.0% for autistic people of working age compared with 84.1% of those without disability, with an unemployment rate for autistic individuals almost eight times that for those without disability

(ABS, 2018)

Latest UK employment figures show the employment rate for disabled people with autism at 31% compared to 54.7% for all disabled people – a significant gap for some neurodiverse people.

(UK Gov, 2025)

Neurodivergent people represent a significant portion of the population, 15% to 20%, with neurodivergent professionals making up an estimated 17% of the workforce

(Deloitte, 2024)

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ND Can Look Like…

- Executive functioning challenges – time-blindness, object permanence
- Interest-based – difficulty doing tasks where there is no interest to motivate
- Ableism – “why can’t you just focus/ do the task/ set a reminder”/ etc
- Dopamine deficit – looks for tasks/activities that will deliver dopamine – off topic
- Attention on everything - sounds all at same volume – becomes overwhelming
- Multitask like a pro – delivers rapid outputs but seems chaotic
- ‘Squirrel’* – easily distracted

*Don’t say ‘squirrel!’

Neurodivergent people are more susceptible to workplace burnout

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Neuro-Inclusive Practices

- Know the people around you – how do they work best
- Be aware of stigma and stereotypes that still exist, don't demand disclosure.
- Don't think you have to be perfect – you don't. Be kind.
- ND and Disability – social model of disability
- 'Curb-cut Effect' – things that support Nders are often good for everyone
- Communication (The 'Ick' Effect):
  - Eye contact – what is the Goldilocks amount?
  - Fidgeting / Stimming
  - ND preference for direct communication, can miss nuance (e.g. "are you hungry?")
  - Rejection Sensitive Dysphoria
  - Emotional dysregulation
- Sensory overwhelm and masking
  - Meetings in meeting rooms, not on the open floor

All brains process information differently and require different conditions in which to do their best work.

These differences are neither 'better' or 'worse'/ 'right' or 'wrong', they are simply different.

Allowing for different ways of processing as standard in work environments leads to better outcomes that benefit everyone.

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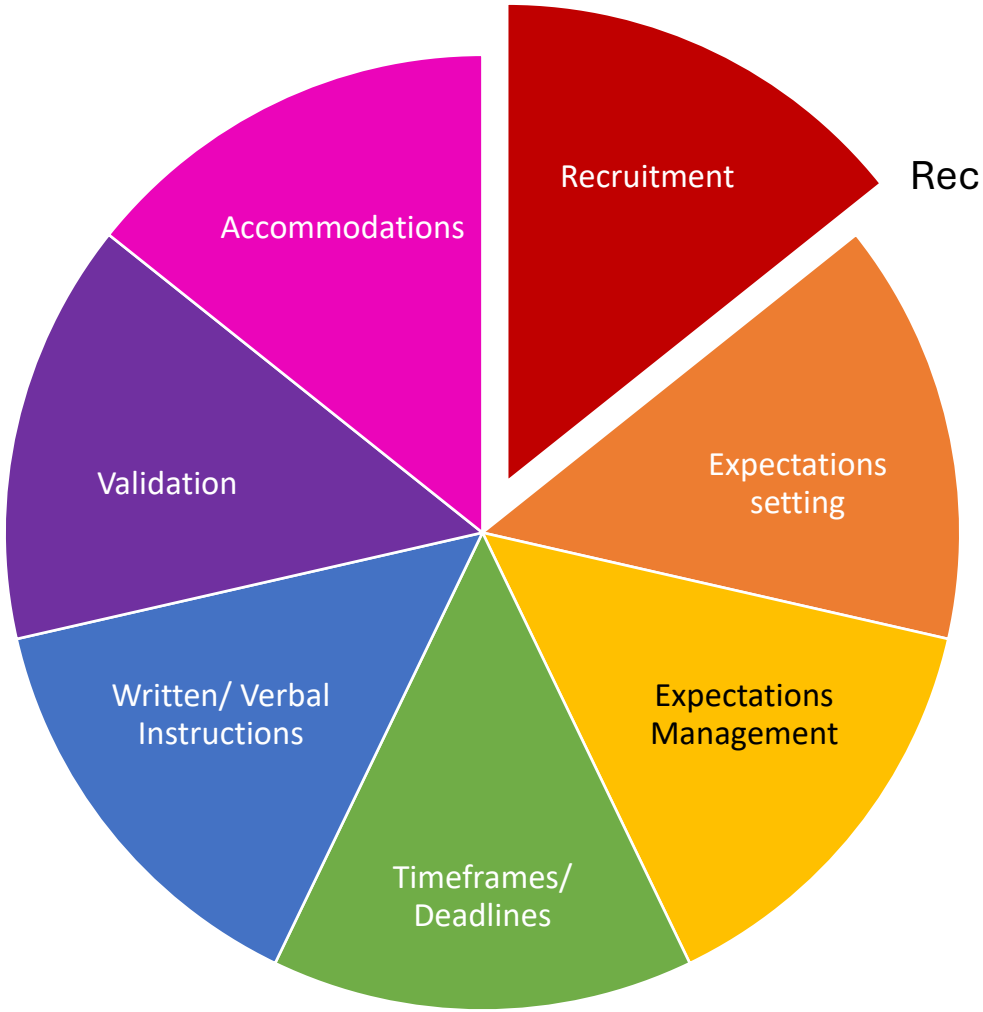
Neuro-Inclusive Leadership

Accommodations:

- Flexible work locations
- Reasonable adjustments – sound, light, etc

How work is allocated:

- Give clear timeframes and set deadlines
- Verbal and/or written – check how people in your team best receive instructions
- BE EXPLICIT about the outcome you're looking for
- Check-ins – some need it, others get 'rage'



Recruitment

- Interview practices (tend to be a 'gotcha' approach, widely not very inclusive)
- Can you give questions early?
- Do you need an interview?

**In some agencies, all candidates for grad roles in government now get about 10-15 minutes of prep time with their interview questions (e.g. ANAO, AER, ABS), regardless of whether they registered with Recruitability

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Questions?

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