



## working for everyone

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# Jobactive Staff Guide | Managing job seekers' complex issues and concerns

### About this guide

Job seekers often present with complex issues and concerns. Taking the time to acknowledge their concerns and help them find suitable support is critical for them to achieve successful employment.

This guide helps *jobactive* staff handle conversations with job seekers about issues and concerns and to refer them to the right support.

*No one is unemployable – creative solutions for overcoming barriers to employment* by Debra L. Angel and Elisabeth E. Harney is also an excellent resource. Some of the ideas presented here are sourced from this book.

**The following common concerns are organised alphabetically. Depending on the needs of the job seeker you are speaking to, this guide provides helpful advice and/or refers you to relevant support.**

- Age bias
- Caring responsibilities
- Computer skills
- Confidence
- Cultural background
- Criminal record
- Disability
- Education (limited)
- English skills (limited)
- Financial stress
- Housing situation
- Mental health/emotional stress
- Motivation
- Overqualification
- Physical illness/injury
- Social isolation
- Transport
- Work history (lack of or gaps in)
- Work referees.

## Age bias

For many employers, age doesn't matter. Refer to the **list of diversity-friendly employers: organisations hiring employees from different backgrounds** in our [additional resources](#). In many industries, mature-age employees are considered a good fit for their clients and business.

## Caring responsibilities

- Juggling work while caring for loved ones can be challenging. If a job seeker is caring for someone with a disability, illness or medical condition there are government payments and support services that can help.
- Working flexible shifts or part time may help to accommodate caring responsibilities. Use the words 'shift' or 'school hours' as a keyword when searching recruitment sites.

Useful information on support for carers is available on:

- [Carers Australia](#) – Resources designed to assist people who are juggling work and caring responsibilities
- [Department of Health and Human Services](#) – Carers information
- [Payment & Services Finder](#)

## Computer skills

- Although it's possible to find jobs that don't require computer skills, many jobs are now advertised online and require an online application.
- Don't let the emphasis on computers put a job seeker off their job search. Many organisations offer free or low-cost computer skill training. Use our [Using a computer for your job search](#) in our [additional resources](#) to learn about basic job search tasks, or access training through local libraries or the Learn Local Community Centre.
- A *jobactive* provider can print resumes so that job seekers can approach organisations directly for work.
- The organisations listed below may also be able to help:
- [Learn Local](#) –Government-registered organisations that provide training programs to help people return to study, learn a new skill or get a job.

- **WIRE (Women's Information Referral Exchange)** – Refers women to local support services, and provides free internet and computer tutoring and employment and career workshops. You can also call them on 1300 134 130.
- **Your local library.** Most local libraries provide free computer courses.

### Confidence

- Use our **Guides** in our **additional resources** for job seekers to learn about the job search process as well as types of work, to prepare for what's ahead.
- Job seekers can ask past colleagues or friends to help them identify skills and to help with their resume. Focusing on strengths builds confidence.
- Job seekers might like to volunteer or join a local organisation. This can be a great way to learn new skills, meet people and increase confidence.
- Use our **Preparing for a job interview guide** in our **additional resources** to find services that specialise in personal grooming and presentation and to learn confident body language and interview skills.
- Some organisations provide professional clothing for interviews. They include **Wear for Success, Dress for Success or Fitted for Work.**

### Cultural background

- A workforce with diverse cultural backgrounds is valued in many organisations.
- Look for companies that service people from the job seeker's ethnic community, where their background and language skills are an asset. Connect with local community associations or ethnic media.
- Use our **Exploring the Australian job market guide** in our **additional resources** to understand how the Australian labour market works. Use the **Getting English language support guide** in our **additional resources** to access targeted support services.

### Criminal record

- Disclosure of a criminal record is not mandatory. Only the job seeker has the right to allow another person access to their criminal history.

- Employers have a legal right to ask whether or not someone has been convicted of a crime, and for some occupations a criminal check is a compulsory part of recruitment.
- Lying on an application is grounds for immediate termination. Refusing to answer questions may prevent a job seeker from being successful.
- When discussing a criminal record be factual and discreet. If a job seeker spent time in prison, they should explain the context and how they have changed. Provide reputable referees who can speak positively about character and involvement in community activities, counselling, support groups or education.
- **This information is not legal advice.** The local law enforcement agency can explain how criminal records are handled in each state.

### Disability

- If a disability will affect a job seeker's ability to perform the tasks of a job, the employer might need that information to properly evaluate and accommodate them.
- If their disability won't affect their ability to perform the job and they won't need to be accommodated for it, then employers generally have neither the right nor need to know about it.
- Use the [Getting support for a disability or a mental illness guide](#) in our [additional resources](#) to locate support services and job search advice.

### Education (limited)

- Identify options from our [Jobs for people with high school to Certificate III training fact sheet](#) in our [additional resources](#). Many occupations don't require formal educational qualifications or can be done after a short industry certification course. Use [Job Outlook](#) to search for occupations sorted by skill and education level.
- Use our [Knowing your skills guide](#) in our [additional resources](#) to identify ways job seekers can upgrade their skills.
- Job seekers should keep up to date by reading about industries they want to work in or talking to people in the industry. They could also learn more through a free online course. Showing up-to-date understanding of a particular field helps to engage employers.

## English skills (limited)

- Job seekers with limited English skills should get support to write a complete resume and standard application letter. Reviewing it with the person who wrote it will ensure they understand the meaning of key words.
- Focus on occupations that don't require writing or require limited verbal communication.
- Enrol in a literacy course at the Local Learning Centre.
- Look for opportunities to use English as much as possible. Volunteering can provide a safe environment to improve skills.

## Financial stress

- If a job seeker is struggling to make ends meet, a number of organisations may be able to help.
- **Good Shepherd Microfinance** offers No Interest loans to people in financial distress
- The **National Debt Helpline** can put people in touch with a free financial counsellor who can help outline options. This is a non-profit organisation funded by the government. They can also discuss services that can help with housing affordability and managing utility bills.

Other options include:

- **Access for Everyone** – a program by Telstra for people on a low income or facing financial hardship to maintain telecommunications access.

## Housing situation

- Employers don't need to know about a job seeker's housing situation. If asked, they can talk generally about their living situation by referring to housemates, friends and the general location they live in.
- If they are living in insecure housing, they may need to work out how to access email, receive mail and take phone calls. If appropriate, they could ask a family member or friend to take messages for them.
- If they have a housing case worker that person could also assist.
- A caseworker may also be able to help a job seeker prepare for interviews by providing access to showers and appropriate clothes.
- **Crisis Help Network: Melbourne Homeless Services** – information regarding crisis accommodation and other services.

- **Access for Everyone** – a program by Telstra for people on a low income or facing financial hardship to maintain telecommunications access.
- **Homelessness Australia** – support services specific to each state.

### Mental health / emotional stress

- Being out of work can create emotional stress and lead to mental distress.
- There are many organisations set up to support job seekers, including peer workers and mentors with valuable lived experience to share.
- Our **Staying positive during your job search guide** in our **additional resources** has activities to help job seekers maintain self-care and build resilience.
- They could consider volunteering until they find paid work. Getting out of the house and connecting with others will support their mental health.
- Job seekers should contact a local GP or a mental health helpline if they are concerned about their mood:
  - **Beyond Blue** – 1300 224 636
  - **Lifeline** – 13 11 14
  - **Sane** – 1800 187 263 Online chat, helpline, resources, podcasts and suicide prevention
  - **Grow Australia** – 1800 558 268 Mental wellness programs and free face-to-face support groups
  - **Mind Australia** – one of the leading providers of mental health services in Victoria
  - **Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia** – national resource and website listing

### Motivation

- Our **Working with employment agencies and recruiters guide** in our **additional resources** can help manage expectations of the job search process and help job seekers to feel prepared.
- Our **Staying positive during your job search guide** in our **additional resources** suggests a balanced routine with weekly goals to keep job seekers motivated.
- Job seekers should contact a local GP or a mental health helpline if they are concerned about their mood (see Mental health above).

## Overqualification

- Employers may be concerned that if a job seeker is overqualified they may not stay in a job with lower pay and less responsibility. Job seekers should explain why they are interested in the job in their cover letter.
- Use the **Downshifting section** in the **Writing a resume to change careers** in our **additional resources** to highlight what is relevant in an application.
- Use our **Finding jobs that are not advertised** in our **additional resources** to access unadvertised opportunities.

## Physical illness/injury

- Get an assessment through an occupational therapist to understand a job seeker's limitations and what jobs are safe.
- Ask questions at the interview to ensure the job will be a good fit. Many employers are focused on getting the right person for the job and are happy to be flexible with how work is performed.
- The following organisations may help:
  - **WorkSafe** – Advice for injured workers explaining the WorkSafe scheme, worker's entitlements and information on returning to work
  - **Occupational Therapists Australia** 1300 682 878 – Find a private therapist to assess the impact of an injury or illness
  - **Australian Job Search Website** – Find a DES (Disability Employment Services) provider with specialist knowledge supporting people with an injury or disability
  - **Work Focus** – Find employment services for injured workers

## Social isolation

- Job seekers should schedule a regular time each week to leave the house and use local facilities to search for jobs (e.g. the local library, jobactive provider or community house).
- Job seekers can also contact local councils to find out about programs or community activities that take place in their area.
- Depending on their situation, they may be eligible to access community outreach programs that can improve their social life.
- Volunteering may also be an option. **Volunteering Victoria** has a portal **govolunteer.com.au** that lists volunteering opportunities in many locations.

## Transport

- You may be able to help with transport costs.
- The online Public Transport Victoria journey planner helps to estimate travel times and plan bus, tram or train options.
- Talk to friends and family about the possibility of carpooling.
- Consider employers who are within walking or riding distance of home.
- Some employers also offer car-pooling programs or flexible hours to help with transport.
- Websites where individuals advertise ride-sharing opportunities include [Shareuride.com.au](http://Shareuride.com.au) or [coseats.com](http://coseats.com).

## Work history (Lack of or gaps in)

- The [Writing a basic resume](#) in our [additional resources](#) helps to explain how to account for gaps in work history.
- In a resume, group short jobs together within the same period (e.g. 2000–2005) instead of listing them separately. Refer to years instead of months when presenting job history.
- Account for gaps by naming them e.g. 'home duties/carer' or 'work/study break'. List tasks that demonstrate transferable skills or achievements.
- If a jobseeker hasn't had paid work for a while they could consider volunteering. This can provide valuable experience and references for a resume.

## Work referees

- Most organisations will conduct a phone reference check before they make an offer. Include positive references with an application if possible.
- If a job seeker has lost contact with past managers, they could try contacting ex-colleagues or the HR department to see if they can help.
- Personal references (e.g. from volunteer work, church, community or sports associations) can be used. Choose referees who are employed and reflect positively on the applicant.
- Job seekers should provide their referee with the advertisement or position description of the job they are applying for and their current resume so that the referee can talk confidently about their skills.

**Find related guides on our resources page**

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