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**Employment study paints bleak picture for autistic job-seekers**

* Unemployment rate for autistic people in Australia six times higher than people without disability
* More than half of unemployed autistic people in Australia have never held a paid job
* 20 per cent of autistic people report they have lost a job due to their autism
* 70 per cent of Australians believe employers should make adjustments for autistic employees in the workplace

Employment opportunities for autistic Australians are dire according to an Australian-first study released today.

The study, commissioned by autism peak body Amaze, revealed that more than half of unemployed autistic Australians (53.9 per cent) have never held a paid job, despite often possessing the skills, qualifications and a strong desire to join the workforce.

Conducted by the Centre for Health and Social Research and Australian Catholic University, the study found that while more than half of autistic Australians would like a paid job, only one in three were currently in a paid role.

The study also found that more than half of employed autistic Australians would like to be working more hours and given a more challenging role, with 45 per cent reporting that their skills are higher than required in their current job.

Amaze CEO Fiona Sharkie said the study’s findings were alarming.

“The message from Australia’s autistic community is abundantly clear – they want to work, and for employers to give them the same opportunities to enjoy participating in the workforce,” Ms Sharkie said.

“In Australia, the unemployment rate for autistic people is 31.6 per cent. This is three times the rate of people with disability, and almost six times the rate of people without disability.

“The study revealed that there is gross underemployment for autistic Australians and that their abilities are underestimated and underutilised in the workplace.

“Autistic employees can bring a range of strengths, interests and skills to the workforce, often demonstrating exemplary characteristics in visual thinking, attention to detail, honesty, efficiency, precision, consistency and low absenteeism.

“The sad reality is autistic people feel unsupported in finding paid work and are challenged by the lack of understanding of autism from potential employers.

“It’s deeply concerning that one in five autistic respondents has lost a job due to their autism. Everyone deserves an opportunity to participate and contribute in the workplace – all it takes is a better understanding of autistic people and the often simple adjustments they need to thrive” she said.

Despite the reported experiences of autistic people and employment, the study – which also looked at community attitudes and behaviour towards autism in the workplace – found that most Australians would support an autistic colleague at work.

“Finding and keeping a job would be easier and more successful for autistic people if potential employers and colleagues understood autism and its characteristics,” Ms Sharkie said.

“This sentiment was echoed in the study by the 70 per cent of Australians who believe employers should make adjustments for autistic employees in the workplace.

“Adjustments to create a more autism inclusive workplace often don’t cost anything to implement,” she added.

The most common adjustments employers can make to be more inclusive of autistic workers include flexible hours, sensory considerations, providing clarity around roles and expectations, offering direct but sensitive feedback and providing routine.

“One in every 100 Australians is autistic and 85 per cent of the community has a personal connection with an autistic person – that’s a huge driver for workplaces to be more adaptable and supportive of autistic people. It all starts with employers creating a work environment that is understanding and recognises the unique skills autistic Australians can offer a multitude of industries,” Ms Sharkie concluded.

Find out more at: [www.onethingforautism.com.au](http://www.onethingforautism.com.au)

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**Background information**

**About autism**

* Autism is a neurodevelopmental lifelong condition, for which there is no cure.
* Over 1 in 100 Australians are autistic.
* Autism affects every person differently. Typical ways autism affects people are:
	+ Challenges with communication and interacting with others
	+ Repetitive and different behaviours, moving in different ways
	+ Strong interest in one topic or subject
	+ Unusual reactions to what they see, hear, smell, touch or taste
	+ Preference for routines and dislike change
* Currently three times as many males are diagnosed with autism than females, although female rates are rising.
* 29 per cent of participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme are autistic – the largest diagnostic group within the Scheme.
* There is no known cause of autism, though research is ongoing to learn more about this. Currently, it is believed to result from changes to the development and growth of the brain, which may be caused by a combination of factors, including environmental and genetic ones. Autism is not caused by vaccination or other medical treatment.

**About Amaze**

Amaze is the peak body for autistic people and their families in Victoria.

Amaze builds understanding, engagement and acceptance of autism, and influences positive systemic change to enable autistic people and their families to participate and contribute to society.

Amaze provides independent, credible information and resources to autistic people, families, professionals, government and the wider community.

The organisation was founded in 1967 by a group of parents who were struggling to find autism resources and set up the ‘Victorian Autistic Children’s and Adult’s Association’. It provided a central information source and supported individuals and their families. The organisation was renamed ‘Autism Victoria Inc’ in 1999 and again renamed Amaze in 2013.