

Summary

Belonging Action Plan

2026–2030

Melbourne Water
Intersectional
Diversity and
Inclusion Roadmap



About this summary

This is a summary of Melbourne Water's full Belonging Action Plan 2026–2030. It explains the main ideas in a shorter and simpler way. To read the full plan, including information on the detailed strategies, actions, co-design process, and data insights, visit the Melbourne Water website.

Acknowledgment of Country

Melbourne Water respectfully acknowledges the Bunurong, Gunaikurnai, Taungurung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woiwurrung peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways on which we rely and operate. We pay our deepest respects to their Elders past and present. We demonstrate our ongoing commitment to reconciliation through our partnerships with Traditional Owners and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as we work together to care for land and water now and into the future, while maintaining and respecting cultural and spiritual connections.



Gerard Black, *We Will Walk Country Together*.

Working towards belonging

At work, and in the communities Melbourne Water serves, some people feel safe, respected, and included. Other people may encounter barriers that are hard for others to recognise.

This plan is about changing that. Melbourne Water wants every person to feel safe, respected, and supported to succeed.

This is not just about compliance, or writing a plan.

**It is about people. It is about fairness.
It is about making experiences better for
employees and for the communities
Melbourne Water serves.**

ISBN: 978-1-921911-13-2

Organisation Name: Melbourne Water

Location: Melbourne Metropolitan

Total number of employees as at 30 June 2025:

Total Employees: 1477 | Total FTE: 1,408.8

Why this matters

Melbourne Water has worked on diversity, inclusion, and belonging for many years.

This plan builds on that work. It looks at where people still encounter barriers at work.

A barrier is something that makes it harder for a person to take part, feel safe, get support, or have the same opportunities as other people. Some barriers are easy to notice. Other barriers are hidden.

A person may encounter barriers because of their gender, culture, disability, age, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, income, language, role type, or life experience.

Some people may experience more than one barrier at the same time. This is sometimes called **intersectionality**.

Intersectionality means that people's lives are made up of many things. These things can overlap and affect how a person experiences work.

This plan focuses on six areas. These are First Peoples, gender equity, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, disability inclusion, culturally and racially marginalised communities, and social disadvantage.

This plan recognises that people may belong to more than one of these groups. This matters because belonging only works when it works for everyone.

Belonging means people do not have to hide who they are. It means Melbourne Water's systems, workplaces, public spaces, and decisions are designed with different people and communities in mind.

This plan is about removing barriers, not asking people to change who they are.



Aboriginal &
Torres Strait
Islander peoples:
First Peoples



LGBTIQ+



Gender Equity



Disability



Social
Disadvantage



CARM:
Culturally
and Racially
Marginalised



What will be different

This plan was shaped by data, employee feedback, and the voices of people with lived experience. Melbourne Water listened to employees, leaders, the Board, community partners, unions, and peak bodies across the six focus areas.

The goal is to turn what people shared into action.

Today	What Melbourne Water is working towards
Melbourne Water already has policies and supports in place. But these policies are not always experienced in the same way by everyone.	A workplace where policies are clear, fair, and used in a consistent way.
Some people may not feel safe to speak up when something is wrong.	A workplace where people feel safe to raise concerns, ask for support, and know they will be taken seriously.
Some barriers are hard to notice.	A workplace where barriers are found, understood, and removed.
Opportunities are not always equal.	Fair access to jobs, learning, development, and career growth.
Some workplaces, systems, and tools do not work well for everyone.	More accessible and inclusive workplaces, systems, and tools.
Inclusion work can sometimes sit with a small number of people.	More accessible and inclusive workplaces, systems, and tools.

People do not change because of a plan on a page. People change when they understand how things could be better and recognise how they can help things improve.



What this means for you

Belonging is something everyone helps create. It is not only the job of one team. It includes employees, leaders, senior leaders, the Board, partners, and peak bodies.

For employees, helping to create belonging means noticing when something is not fair and speaking up when it is safe to do so. It means respecting different experiences, using inclusive language, listening to others, and helping to remove barriers so everyone can take part.

It also means taking part in learning and belonging activities, so we can keep building a workplace where people feel safe and respected.

For leaders, helping to create belonging means making fair decisions and removing barriers where they exist. It means understanding people's experiences, acting on feedback, supporting flexible and inclusive ways of working, and making sure policies are used fairly.

Leaders also have a responsibility to be accountable for progress.

For senior leaders and the Board, helping to create belonging means leading through clear and consistent action, and asking for updates. It means making sure the plan is supported and keeping belonging part of decision-making.

For partners and peak bodies, helping to create belonging means sharing learning, supporting sector-wide change, and helping to improve equity both across the water sector and across the wider community.

How progress will be tracked

Melbourne Water will keep checking what is working and what needs to improve. Progress will be measured each year.

Employee feedback will be used to help improve actions.

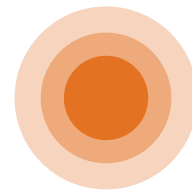
Melbourne Water will respond to new and emerging barriers as they are identified.

Progress on different parts of the plan will be reported at different times. The Melbourne Water website will be the central place to find the latest public results and updates.

From 2027, Melbourne Water will publish an Annual Belonging Summary. This will give people a clear update on progress, priorities, and next steps.

This plan will keep evolving as Melbourne Water learns.

Belonging does not happen on its own. It needs equity, inclusion, and action. This plan sets out how Melbourne Water will keep working so more people experience belonging every day.



Diversity Demographics at all levels of the workforce

What we know

Melbourne Water’s workforce does not yet reflect the full diversity of the communities it serves. Some groups are still underrepresented, especially in operational and leadership roles.

The data shows that women make up 41.4% of the workforce. Women’s representation is similar across most leadership levels, but women hold only 30.2% of Service Delivery roles.

First Peoples employees make up 1.3% of the workforce and are not currently represented in senior leadership roles.

Employees with disability and LGBTIQ+ employees are represented across the organisation, including in leadership roles. However, some groups are still underrepresented compared with the broader community.

Many employees also report concerns about fairness in promotion and career progression. This is especially true for First Peoples employees, people with disability, and LGBTIQ+ employees.

Some employees may encounter more than one barrier at the same time. This can affect their experience at work and their access to opportunities.

Women hold most part-time roles across the organisation. Flexible work arrangements are more common for carers and employees with disability, but these roles are often concentrated at lower levels. This can limit career progression over time.

Melbourne Water has introduced the Voluntary Diversity and Inclusion Information Form. This form helps Melbourne Water better understand workforce diversity. However, not many employees have completed the form yet. This makes it harder to understand workforce trends and know where barriers need to be removed.

What we will do

We will focus on building a workforce that better reflects the diversity of the community and on improving how workforce data is collected and used.

We will:

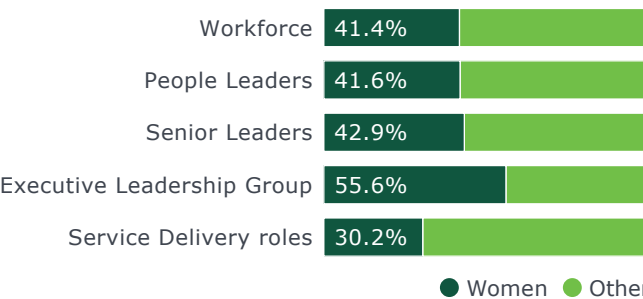
- improve how diversity information is collected, updated, and protected
- encourage more employees to share voluntary diversity information safely and confidently
- use workforce data to identify gaps, remove barriers, and support fair workforce planning
- improve representation across leadership, operational, and part-time roles
- regularly review workforce trends across different employee groups

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- maintain progress toward the 40:40:20 gender balance target. This means 40% women, 40% men, and 20% people of any gender
- increase representation of underrepresented groups across all workforce levels
- increase completion of the Voluntary Diversity and Inclusion Information form to 70%
- achieve strong employee survey results on diversity, inclusion, and respect
- better understand where barriers exist and take action to remove them

Figure 1: Gender representation across workforce levels



Diversity segregation in the workplace

What we know

This section looks at where different employee groups work across Melbourne Water. It is different from overall workforce diversity. Overall diversity tells us who is in the workforce. Workforce segregation tells us whether some groups are concentrated in certain jobs, teams, or levels.

This matters because where people work can affect their pay, career pathways, development opportunities, and access to leadership roles.

Women are well represented overall and across many leadership roles. However, they remain underrepresented in operational and field-based roles.

Women hold most part-time roles across Melbourne Water. Flexible work can support inclusion and participation. However, part-time and flexible roles are often concentrated at lower workforce levels.

This can affect long-term career progression.

Employees from underrepresented groups report different workplace experiences depending on their role, level, and work area. This includes First Peoples employees, employees with disability, LGBTIQ+ employees, employees from culturally and racially marginalised communities, and employees with diverse gender identities.

Some employees experience barriers to progression, access to development opportunities, or participation in leadership pathways.

These patterns show that workforce diversity is not evenly distributed across all areas of the organisation. This can limit representation in decision-making, leadership, and technical or operational career pathways.

Low participation in the Voluntary Diversity and Inclusion Information Form also makes it harder to understand workforce patterns and where barriers may exist. Better workforce data will help Melbourne Water understand where different groups work, where barriers exist, and what needs to change.

What we will do

We will focus on reducing role and level gaps, so more people have fair access to opportunities across the organisation.

We will:

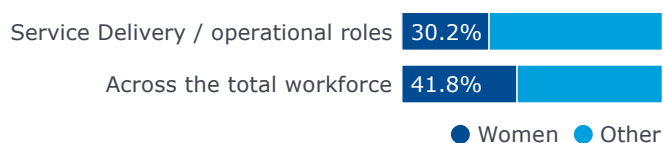
- improve representation across operational, technical, leadership, and Service Delivery roles
- review where different employee groups work across roles, teams, and levels to identify barriers
- review job design, flexible work, and part-time options so more roles are accessible to more people
- support fair access to development opportunities and leadership pathways
- strengthen inclusive recruitment, progression, and workforce planning practices
- use workforce diversity data to monitor trends and measure progress over time

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- increase representation of underrepresented groups across all workforce levels and role types
- reduce gaps in participation across leadership, operational, technical, and Service Delivery roles
- improve employee survey results relating to inclusion, fairness, and career opportunities
- increase participation in voluntary diversity information collection
- build a more balanced workforce across teams, roles, and levels

Figure 2: Women in operational vs overall workforce



Diversity composition of the governing body

What we know

Melbourne Water is governed by a Board, or group of people responsible for overseeing how the organisation is run. The Board is also known as Melbourne Water’s governing body. Melbourne Water is committed to ensuring that its governing body reflects the diversity of the community it serves.

A diverse governing body supports stronger decision-making. It brings different perspectives, experiences, skills, and backgrounds into board discussions and decisions.

Melbourne Water has made progress in improving gender representation on the Board.

As at 30 June 2025, the Board was made up of 60% women and 40% men. From 1 October 2025, this changed to 70% women and 30% men.

The Board includes people with lived experience across several of Melbourne Water’s six focus areas. However, there is currently no gender diverse, non-binary, or transgender representation on the Board.

Building diversity in governance is important because the Board helps shape organisational culture, priorities, decision-making, and accountability.

Representation at this level can also increase employee and community confidence that different perspectives are recognised and valued.

A more diverse governing body helps Melbourne Water strengthen inclusion, improve accountability, and better respond to the needs of employees, customers, and the wider community.

What we will do

We will continue to strengthen diversity and inclusion across the Board and governance structures.

We will:

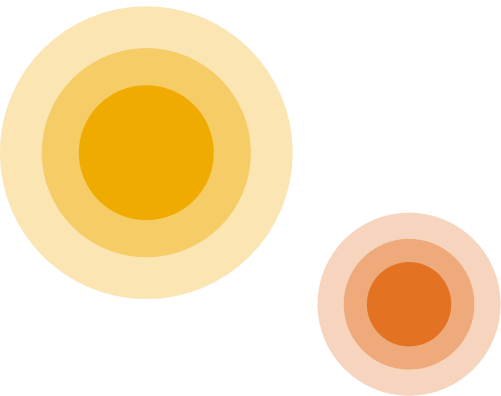
- use the Board Skills and Diversity Matrix to better understand Board diversity
- include all six focus areas in Board diversity planning
- provide advice to the Minister for Water to support Board appointments that reflect the community Melbourne Water serves
- publicly report on Board diversity through the Annual Report
- consider diversity, equity, and belonging in governance and decision-making

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- maintain strong gender representation on the Board
- support improved diversity representation across the governing body over time
- use Board diversity information to support future planning and appointments
- publicly report on Board diversity
- ensure governance practices better reflect the diversity of the community Melbourne Water serves

Figure 3: Gender composition of the Board





Fair hiring and career progression

What we know

Our data shows a mixed picture of fair hiring and career progression at Melbourne Water.

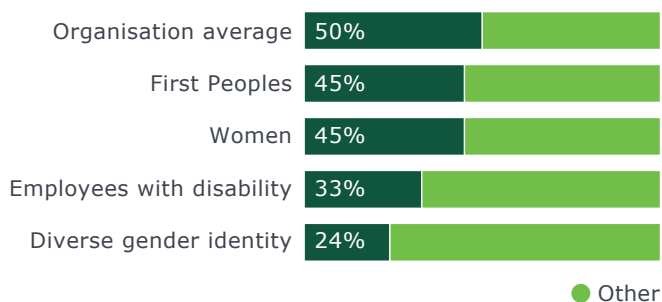
Overall, recruitment and promotion outcomes are fairly balanced by gender. In 2025, 42% of new hires were women and 58% were men. For promotions, 54% were women and 46% were men.

However, employees who identify as First Peoples, LGBTIQ+, employees with disability, people from culturally and racially marginalised communities, or people with diverse gender identities report lower confidence in career progression, promotion opportunities, and learning and development. First Peoples employees report positive recruitment experiences, but fewer positive experiences once employed. Employees with diverse gender identities report the lowest levels of perceived fairness.

This shows that while recruitment processes may be improving, barriers still exist after hiring. These barriers affect progression, development, and promotion for some groups.

Better diversity data, including higher participation in voluntary diversity information, will help us track progress and improve outcomes over time.

Figure 4: Perceptions of fairness in career progression



What we will do

We will focus on making recruitment, onboarding, and career progression fair, clear, and accessible for everyone.

We will:

- make recruitment and onboarding more inclusive, accessible, and flexible
- be clearer about pay, progression pathways, and career opportunities
- improve how interviews and selection processes are run so they are fair and inclusive
- remove barriers to progression, especially for underrepresented groups
- increase representation of women and other underrepresented groups across roles and leadership pathways
- strengthen culturally safe career development and mentoring, particularly for First Peoples employees

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- maintain recruitment aligned to the 40:40:20 gender balance target. This means 40% women, 40% men, and 20% people of any gender.
- improve employee survey results each year on fairness in recruitment, promotion, progression, and learning
- increase participation in career development and leadership programs for women and employees across our six focus areas
- improve consistency in experiences of fairness across different employee groups, while protecting privacy



Pay equity

What we know

Melbourne Water is committed to fair and equitable pay practices.

Pay equity means employees receive equal pay for work of equal or comparable value, regardless of gender or background. It also means identifying and removing barriers that may contribute to different pay outcomes across the organisation.

The 2025 audit shows that Melbourne Water has made progress on reducing pay gaps between base salaries. A pay gap compares the average pay of different groups. Base salary means the regular salary an employee is paid, before extra payments like overtime or allowances.

The mean base salary gender pay gap is 0.4%, and the median base salary gap is 0.0%. This means base pay is close to equal overall.

However, total pay can still be affected by things like overtime, allowances, role type, and access to higher-paid roles.

Differences in representation across leadership, specialist, and operational roles continue to influence pay outcomes.

Pay equity is shaped by many things, including recruitment, promotion opportunities, career progression, flexible work access, and representation in senior roles.

Melbourne Water cannot yet fully assess pay equity across all diversity groups because participation in the Voluntary Diversity and Inclusion Information Form is still low.

Improving pay equity supports a more inclusive workplace. It helps Melbourne Water to attract and support the development of a more diverse workforce, while creating an environment where people choose to stay.

What we will do

We will continue to strengthen fair and equitable pay practices across the organisation.

We will:

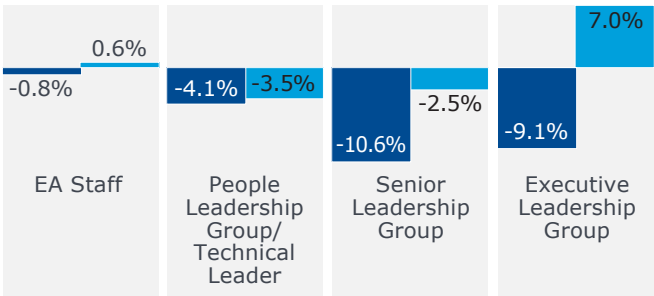
- review pay equity data each year across different roles and workforce levels
- monitor gender pay gaps in base salary and total remuneration
- use workforce data to better understand pay gaps across different employee groups
- review recruitment, promotion, and remuneration practices to identify and reduce barriers
- make pay information, salary tables, and progression processes easier to find and understand
- support fair access to career development, flexible work, and leadership opportunities

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- reduce mean total remuneration gender pay gap by at least 50% across the organisation
- develop a plan to address pay gaps greater than 5% for any occupation group
- improve employee awareness of pay equity and pay transparency
- make remuneration processes easier to understand
- improve representation across leadership and higher-paid roles
- continue improving pay equity outcomes across the organisation

Figure 5: Base Salary Gap 2023 and Base Salary Gap 2025 by Level to CEO



● Base Salary Gap 2023 ● Base Salary Gap 2025

Respectful and safe workplace culture

What we know

A respectful and safe workplace culture is essential to employee wellbeing, inclusion, and performance.

Melbourne Water is committed to creating a workplace where all employees feel safe, valued, and respected. Bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence are not accepted.

The 2025 Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Census showed that some employees still experience harm at work. In the survey, 2.2% of respondents reported experiencing sexual harassment, 8.1% reported experiencing bullying, and 3.4% reported experiencing discrimination.

These results have improved since 2024, but they are still a concern.

There is also a gap between what employees shared anonymously in the Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Census and what was formally reported. This suggests that some employees may not feel safe or confident to openly raise concerns.

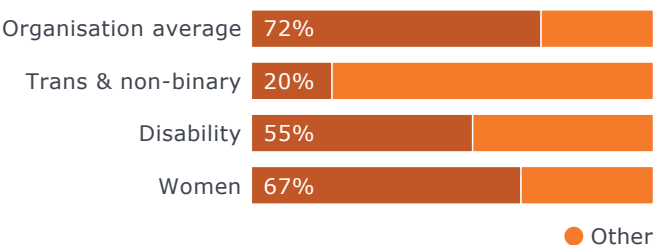
Harm is not experienced equally across the organisation. First Peoples employees, LGBTIQ+ employees, employees with disability, carers, and Enterprise Agreement employees reported higher rates of some harmful behaviours.

Psychological safety also varies across groups. Some employees feel less safe to call out inappropriate behaviour. This is especially true for transgender and non-binary employees, employees with disability, and women.

This shows that Melbourne Water needs clear, safe, and trusted ways for people to raise concerns and get support.

A respectful and safe workplace is not only about policies. It is also shaped by leadership, everyday behaviour, trust, accountability, and how people respond when harm occurs.

Figure 6: Employees who feel safe to speak up



What we will do

We will continue to strengthen a workplace culture that is respectful, inclusive, and safe for everyone.

We will:

- promote clear expectations for respectful workplace behaviour
- strengthen prevention and response approaches for bullying, harassment, discrimination, and workplace harm
- provide safe, accessible, and trauma-informed reporting pathways
- create an anonymous feedback channel for concerns about exclusion, inappropriate behaviour, and psychological safety
- train and support Contact Officers across the organisation
- build leadership capability to support respectful, inclusive, and psychologically safe teams
- hold regular Respectful and Safe Workplace "Ask Anything" sessions with senior leaders
- monitor workplace culture data and employee feedback to identify areas for improvement

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- reduce reported experiences of sexual harassment, bullying, and discrimination by at least 50%
- increase formal reporting by 30%, showing greater trust in reporting pathways
- improve employee awareness of reporting pathways and support options
- maintain trained Contact Officers across the organisation
- strengthen employee confidence in a respectful and safe workplace culture
- improve employee perceptions of psychological safety and inclusion
- support leaders to model respectful and inclusive behaviours



Intersectional leave entitlements: availability and use

What we know

Access to flexible and inclusive leave helps employees balance work, health, caring responsibilities, cultural obligations, and personal wellbeing.

Melbourne Water provides a range of leave options to support employees with different life experiences, responsibilities, and needs. This includes leave for carers, families, cultural responsibilities, gender affirmation, wellbeing, and family and domestic violence support.

Flexible work is the most used support. In the 2025 Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging Census, 76% of respondents said they use flexible work.

However, flexible work is not experienced the same way by everyone. First Peoples employees and transgender and non-binary employees reported lower use and lower confidence that flexibility would be supported.

Carer's leave is widely used across the organisation. Parental leave data shows more men are taking paid parental leave, but women still take longer unpaid leave, reflecting ongoing gendered caring patterns.

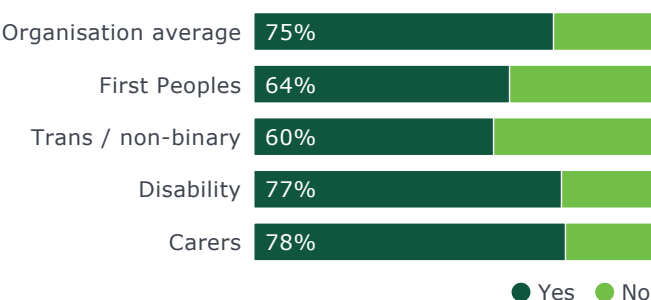
Family Violence Leave was accessed by six employees. Employees rated this support highly overall, but confidence was lower for transgender and non-binary employees.

Melbourne Water has also introduced Gender Affirming Leave. There is not yet enough usage data to understand how this leave is being accessed.

Other leave options include Sorry Business, Cultural, and Ceremonial Leave for First Peoples, as well as public holiday substitution.

Understanding how employees access and use leave will help Melbourne Water identify barriers, improve inclusion, and better support wellbeing.

Figure 7: Employees confident they can access flexible work



What we will do

We will continue to strengthen inclusive leave practices and improve fair access to leave and flexible work across the organisation.

We will:

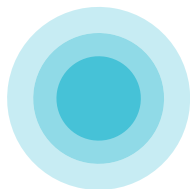
- review leave policies and practices to support inclusion, wellbeing, and accessibility
- improve employee awareness of available leave and flexible work options
- support carers, parents, and employees with health or wellbeing needs
- strengthen flexible work options, including options for those in operational and maintenance roles where possible
- support leaders to apply leave policies fairly and consistently
- use workforce data and employee feedback to understand barriers and improve access over time
- promote a workplace culture where employees feel safe and supported to use leave

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- improve employee awareness of inclusive leave and flexible work options
- strengthen employee confidence in accessing leave and flexible work
- reduce barriers affecting fair access to leave and flexibility
- improve employee perceptions of wellbeing, inclusion, and workplace support
- support fair and consistent use of leave policies across the organisation
- continue building a workplace culture where employees feel supported to balance work and personal responsibilities





Facilities and physical workplace environments and conditions

What we know

Accessible, safe, and inclusive workplaces help employees participate fully and do their work well.

Melbourne Water recognises that workplaces, facilities, and working conditions can affect people differently.

Employees work across offices, operational sites, and field environments. This means their needs and experiences can be different.

Some employees may encounter barriers because of accessibility needs, cultural needs, health, caring responsibilities, gender, role type, location, or disability.

The research found that access to inclusive facilities is not always consistent across sites. Some sites have accessible bathrooms, meeting rooms, and parking, but these are not always easy to use or book.

Some employees need quiet, wellbeing, or private spaces. These spaces are not always available or suitable.

Employees in field-based roles may also encounter barriers with bathroom access, hygiene, showers, uniforms, PPE, and equipment.

For some employees, PPE and uniforms may not fit properly or meet their needs. This can affect comfort, safety, and dignity at work.

First Peoples employees may also need stronger cultural safety in physical spaces, including the use of cultural markers, Acknowledgment of Country signage, and access to yarning spaces.

Improving workplace environments is about more than making changes to buildings. It is about improving safety, dignity, access, and belonging.

Figure 8: Workplace environments are not experienced equally

Inclusive workplace	Current gaps
Accessible, clean bathrooms	Inconsistent bathroom access and hygiene
Private lactation or chest/breastfeeding spaces	Limited private spaces for lactation or chest/breastfeeding
PPE and uniforms that fit all bodies	Poor PPE fit and limited equipment options
Cultural elements built into spaces	Cultural elements not embedded
Sensory-friendly and quiet wellbeing areas	Limited sensory-friendly and wellbeing spaces

What we will do

We will continue to improve workplaces, facilities, and working conditions to support inclusion, accessibility, and wellbeing.

We will:

- review workplace facilities and sites to identify access and inclusion barriers
- improve access to safe, clean, inclusive, and accessible amenities
- consider accessibility, cultural inclusion, and wellbeing in workplace design and planning
- improve access to wellbeing rooms, quiet spaces, and private spaces where possible
- review PPE, uniforms, and equipment so they better meet different needs
- improve access to sanitary products, toilet mapping, and travel kits for remote work
- strengthen cultural markers and inclusive signage across sites
- use employee feedback to improve workplace conditions over time

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- improve employee perceptions of workplace accessibility, safety, and inclusion
- reduce barriers affecting participation across different workplaces and work environments
- improve access to inclusive and accessible facilities across the organisation
- complete regular site reviews to identify access and inclusion issues
- ensure new building upgrades and infrastructure projects consider inclusive design
- strengthen employee confidence in requesting workplace adjustments and support
- continue building workplaces that are safe, accessible, and inclusive for all employees

Workplace systems and habits: policies, procedures, and practice

What we know

Workplace systems, policies, procedures, and everyday practices shape how people experience work.

Melbourne Water has inclusive policies in place. However, policies are not always used in the same way across teams, roles, and locations.

This can create a gap between what a policy says and what employees experience in everyday work.

Employees may encounter barriers when workplace systems are hard to access, unclear, inconsistently applied, or not designed with diverse needs in mind.

This can affect employees with disability, neurodivergent employees, employees from culturally and racially marginalised communities, and carers.

Barriers can also occur when information is difficult to find, understand, or access in different formats and languages.

Digital systems are important. Employees use digital tools to access information, complete processes, and get support. These systems need to be accessible and easy to use.

Melbourne Water also recognises that Artificial Intelligence, or AI, must be used carefully. AI systems can create or repeat biases unless fairness, accessibility, and inclusion are considered from the start.

Everyday workplace habits also affect inclusion and belonging, including how decisions are made, information is shared, and flexible work is supported.

Improving systems and habits will help Melbourne Water make workplace information clearer, fairer, and easier to access.

Figure 5: Inclusive policies vs everyday experience

Policy What is designed	Practice What employees experience
Inclusive policies in place	Inconsistent application across teams
Fair and equitable processes	Barriers for some groups
Accessible digital systems	Digital systems not always accessible
AI designed to support fairness	Risk of bias in systems and AI
Commitment to inclusion across all areas	Inclusion not experienced equally

What we will do

We will continue improving workplace systems, policies, procedures, and practices to support inclusion, accessibility, and fair outcomes.

We will:

- review workplace policies and procedures to identify barriers affecting different employee groups
- make workplace systems, processes, and information clearer and easier to access
- complete a Digital Accessibility Maturity Assessment for internal and external digital platforms
- create a searchable, plain-language policy hub on the intranet
- improve guidance on inclusive language and accessible communication
- consider fairness, accessibility, and bias when using and developing AI and digital tools
- support fair and consistent use of workplace policies across teams and business areas
- use employee feedback and workforce data to identify improvement opportunities

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- improve employee confidence in workplace systems, policies, and processes
- reduce barriers affecting fair access to workplace supports and opportunities
- improve accessibility of internal and external digital platforms
- make workplace policies easier to find, understand, and use
- strengthen consistency and fairness in workplace practices across the organisation
- ensure that workplace systems and practices better reflect the needs of a diverse workforce
- continue building a workplace culture that supports inclusion, fairness, and belonging

Inclusive workplace culture, capability, and leadership

What we know

An inclusive workplace culture helps employees feel safe, respected, valued, and able to take part as themselves.

Melbourne Water has strong foundations in respect and team connection. Most employees report positive experiences with their immediate teams.

The data shows that 89% of employees agree that their manager treats employees with dignity and respect. It also shows that 87% agree that their workgroup treats each other respectfully.

However, some employees report lower levels of belonging, cultural safety, and confidence to speak up. This is true for employees with disability, transgender, gender diverse, and non-binary employees.

Employees from underrepresented groups may also encounter barriers to inclusion, career development, leadership pathways, or psychological safety.

Leadership plays an important role in shaping workplace culture. Leaders influence how people are treated, how decisions are made, how safe people feel to speak up, and whether inclusive behaviours are part of everyday work.

Training and awareness are important, but they are not enough on their own. Inclusive behaviours also need to be part of everyday practice, leadership expectations, and accountability.

Melbourne Water will keep building the skills, knowledge, and confidence of employees and leaders so that inclusion is not treated as optional. Instead, it becomes part of how people work.

Figure 6: Respect is high, but belonging is not equal for all



What we will do

We will continue strengthening inclusive workplace culture, capability, and leadership across Melbourne Water.

We will:

- provide learning opportunities across the six focus areas
- support leaders to build teams where people feel respected, included, and safe to speak up
- promote inclusive behaviours and everyday practices across the organisation
- strengthen employee understanding of diversity, equity, and belonging
- support employees with disability, neurodivergence, caring responsibilities, and other needs through the Inclusion Passport, which helps employees record and transfer workplace adjustments and support needs
- support financial wellbeing and inclusion for employees experiencing hardship
- involve senior leaders in Days of Significance and inclusion events
- embed inclusive leadership expectations into performance, development, and leadership programs
- use employee feedback and workforce data to identify improvement opportunities

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- improve employee perceptions of inclusion, belonging, and psychological safety
- strengthen leadership skills in inclusion, equity, and cultural awareness
- increase participation in inclusion-focused learning and leadership development
- improve awareness and use of the Inclusion Passport
- ensure that employees feel safe to speak up and take part as themselves
- strengthen accountability for inclusive leadership across the organisation
- continue building a workplace culture where all employees feel respected, valued, and included



Community and sector impact

What we know

Melbourne Water's actions and decisions can affect inclusion, accessibility, and fairness beyond the organisation.

As a public sector organisation, Melbourne Water works with customers, communities, Traditional Owners, contractors, suppliers, industry partners, and other government organisations.

This means that Melbourne Water can help improve inclusion through the way its employees work, buy goods and services, design projects, share information, and partner with others.

Some communities may encounter barriers when accessing services, taking part in engagement, or working with Melbourne Water.

Inclusive community engagement helps Melbourne Water better understand the needs and experiences of the diverse communities it serves.

Melbourne Water also has an important role in the water sector. It can share learning, support better practice, and work with others to improve diversity, equity, and belonging across the sector.

The full plan shows that volunteer leave is available but not used as much as it could be. Full-time permanent employees have access to two days of paid volunteer leave each year. However, in 2025, only 131 volunteer leave days were used out of 2,532 available days.

Melbourne Water also wants to strengthen social procurement. This means choosing suppliers and partners in ways that support inclusion, fairness, and community benefit.

This work helps Melbourne Water build stronger relationships, improve accountability, and better respond to the needs of employees, customers, and the wider community.

Figure 7: Volunteer leave: available vs used



What we will do

We will continue strengthening inclusive practices across community engagement, procurement, partnerships, and sector collaboration.

We will:

- improve inclusive and accessible community engagement practices
- strengthen relationships with Traditional Owners, community groups, and diverse stakeholders
- increase awareness and use of volunteer leave
- support volunteering opportunities linked to Melbourne Water's six focus areas
- consider diversity, equity, and inclusion in procurement, partnerships, and supplier practices
- use Equity Impact Assessments to check whether public-facing projects and decisions are fair for different communities
- support inclusive communication and accessible information across customer and community interactions
- work with the water sector and government partners to share learning and improve practice
- strengthen support for employees, customers, and communities affected by family and domestic violence

What success looks like

By 2030, we aim to:

- increase use of volunteer leave by 50%
- strengthen relationships with diverse communities, stakeholders, and sector partners
- establish at least seven community partnerships and five sector collaboration initiatives
- use Equity Impact Assessments in most major projects and policy decisions that impact or involve community
- strengthen social procurement requirements in new or updated procurement policies and contracts
- improve accessibility and inclusion across community engagement and customer interactions
- continue building positive and inclusive impacts across the communities and sectors with whom Melbourne Water works

This plan was developed together

The Belonging Action Plan 2026–2030 was shaped through collective efforts across and beyond Melbourne Water.

It brings together employee feedback, workforce data, and lived experience expertise contributed by leaders, teams, industry partners, unions, peak bodies, and community representatives.

Thank you to everyone who shared their experience, knowledge, and ideas to support this work.

Belonging is built over time. It depends on everyday actions, shared responsibility, and a commitment to keep learning and improving.

Read the full Belonging Action Plan

This document is a summary of Melbourne Water's Belonging Action Plan 2026–2030.

The full plan includes more detail about the actions, indicators, data insights, and co-design processes that support this work.

To read the full plan:



Scan the QR code or go to [Belonging Action Plan 2026-2030 | Melbourne Water](#)

You can also visit the Melbourne Water website to follow future updates on the plan.

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