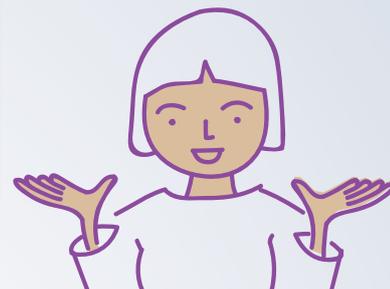


# Working with women with disabilities

This tip sheet was developed for workers by Women with Disabilities Victoria with support from DVRCV.

Women with disabilities experience **higher levels** of violence than other women but are **under-represented** as users of family violence, sexual assault, counselling and victim support services.

Workers can **support women** with disabilities by maintaining a **strengths-based approach** and **avoiding deficit language**.



Focus on the person and their support requirements rather than the disability.

✓ “Leanne **has an acquired brain injury** and **understands new information best** when it is clear and succinct and a written summary is provided. **She is able** to assess her own level of risk when given sufficient time to understand and consider her situation.”

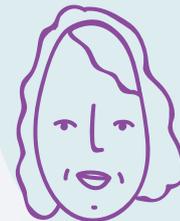


✗ “Leanne’s acquired brain injury causes difficulties with short term memory, and increases her vulnerability and risk.”

It’s more important to **understand her strengths and the support she requires**.

A woman **may not describe herself as having a disability** despite receiving National Disability Insurance Scheme or Centrelink payments for people with a disability. This may include people who have a chronic health condition, an illness or an impairment, who belong to the deaf community or who have a mental illness.

Avoid **describing people as their disability**



✓ “Mia has schizophrenia.”  
“Eleni has autism.”

✗ “Mia is *schizophrenic*.”  
“Eleni is *autistic*.”

If you are describing a woman’s disability:

Avoid **deficit language**

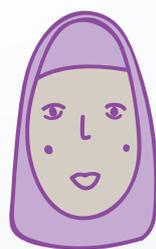
Use **factual language** that doesn’t **reinforce stereotypes, imply weakness** or **alienate** women.

✓ “Does your partner provide you with support?”

✗ “Are you *dependent* on your partner?”

✓ “Hanh uses some spoken words and a communication device. She understands spoken and written English.”

✗ “Hanh has communication *problems*.”



**People are not ‘bound’** by wheelchairs, **they are enabled** by them.

✓ “Mia uses a wheelchair.”

✗ “Mia is *wheelchair-bound*.”



Talk about accessibility rather than disability.

✓ “Louise has early stage dementia.”  
“Jenny was recently diagnosed with depression.”

✗ “Louise *suffers* from dementia.”  
“Jenny *struggles* with depression.”

Describe facilities, language and signage as **accessible**, not **disabled or handicapped**.

✓ “Fatima requires an *accessible* refuge.”

✗ “Fatima requires a refuge with a *disabled toilet*.”

