



‘What works’ in employment services and supports for mature-age jobseekers with acquired disability and health conditions

**Plain language evidence synthesis
summary**

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Acknowledgement of Country

We respectfully acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which Centre for Inclusive Employment is located, in Melbourne's east and outer-east, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present. We are honoured to recognise our connection to Wurundjeri Country, history, culture, and spirituality through these locations, and strive to ensure that we operate in a manner that respects and honours the Elders and Ancestors of these lands. We also respectfully acknowledge Swinburne's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, alumni, partners and visitors.

We also acknowledge and respect the Traditional Owners of lands across Australia, their Elders, Ancestors, cultures, and heritage, and recognise the continuing sovereignties of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

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Summary

More than one fifth of Australians aged 45-64 have acquired disability through illness or injury, chronic health conditions, or late diagnosis of disability. Their ability to work, and in what capacity, varies. It can depend on their type of disability and its impact on their health, movement, energy, time and personal resources. It can also depend on their work history, their education, where they live, the availability of work suited to their skills and circumstances, how that work is structured, their access to support outside work, and their household structure.

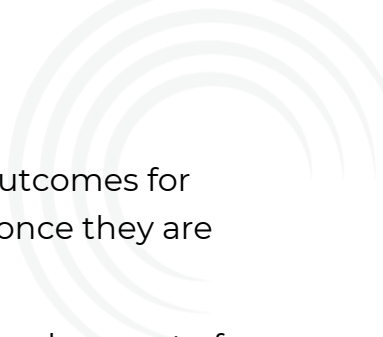
Growing numbers of Australians will spend up to half their working lives with acquired disability and chronic health conditions. The nature of work is also changing, locally and globally, bringing new challenges and opportunities for Australian employers and workers. Employment services and supports have a critical bridging role to play in this environment. They can help people find and keep work that suits their expertise, interests, and life outside work when their capacity to work changes due to disability or ill-health. They can also help employers understand and adapt to the changing workforce and to realise its full potential.

What we know about what works

Employment services and supports can’t overcome all barriers to work for people who acquire disability or a health condition after the age of 45. However, understanding how individual circumstances and service systems shape the working lives of this group is important to begin to improve their employment outcomes.

What works

Available evidence from Australia and overseas suggests that keys to success



for *employment services and supports* to improve employment outcomes for people aged over 45 with acquired disability or health conditions once they are out of work are to:

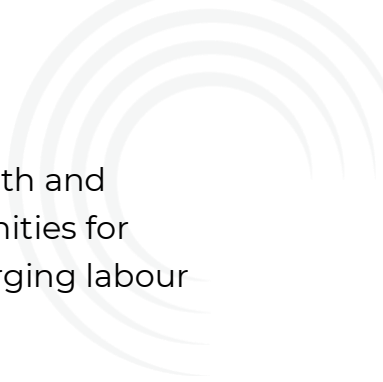
1. firmly position mature-age jobseekers with partial capacity to work as part of the labour supply in local labour markets
2. invest time with employers before and early in recruitment processes to build disability-confident workplaces, and create inclusive and flexible employment opportunities,
3. shift the focus of customised or negotiated employment from medical diagnosis to the effect of disability on a person's capacity to work,
4. give employers tools to successfully recruit, hire and retain mature-aged workers with acquired disability and chronic health conditions,
5. give jobseekers tools to help them understand their rights and equip them to find and keep work suited to their strengths and circumstances,
6. place more focus on equipping potential employers to prepare and manage (re)entry to work for mature-age new hires and less focus on equipping individual older jobseekers for work, and
7. forge connections across service systems and sectors that support both employees' and employers' needs.

What doesn't work

Australian labour force data and employment services caseload data suggests that current efforts to keep people aged over 45 attached to the labour market when their capacity to work changes due to disability or ill-health, or to help them return to work after their career is disrupted, are misdirected.

More than half of the Inclusive Employment Australia caseload is aged over 45, with the majority aged 55 and over. Most of these jobseekers have restricted capacity to work, in terms of hours or the type of work they can do. Many more Australians aged 45-64 with acquired disability or health conditions are engaged in mainstream employment services or are not in the labour force. Historically, the likelihood of them returning to work after they have been out of work is low.

Compliance-driven and individualised approaches to helping jobseekers aged 45 and over with disability and health conditions find and keep work are not meeting the scale of need for secure, inclusive, flexible, part-time, negotiated and customised working arrangements that can keep people attached to the workforce when their capacity to work changes and – importantly - that are



compatible with other support they may need to cover rising health and disability-related costs. These approaches also undersell opportunities for employers presented by this underutilised talent pool in the emerging labour market.

What we don't know

While there are examples of success, there is no clear evidence of 'what works' in employment services and supports *at scale* to boost employment for people aged 45-64 with acquired disability and health conditions in Australia. In part, this reflects the highly individualised nature of matching these jobseekers with varying skills and needs to employers with varying skills and needs, with different levels of effort and investment in different contexts.

The range of shifting individual, organisational and structural factors at the intersection of disability, health, ageing, income support and employment shaping the working lives of people aged 45-64 with disability and health conditions in Australia makes it difficult to confidently pinpoint where employment services and supports alone can improve their employment outcomes at a population level.

Importantly, the extent to which the private sector is willing and able to create well-paid and secure employment opportunities for older workers with disability and health conditions who have partial and fluctuating capacity to work, in addition to creating employment opportunities for other groups of marginalised jobseekers, needs closer examination.

Implications for employment services

What emerges consistently from research and practice is that barriers to work for people aged 45-64 with acquired disability and health conditions are overwhelmingly tied to the structure of work and surrounding systems keeping them out of the workforce. This indicates that shifting the focus of employment services for this group away from equipping individual jobseekers to work towards helping employers to create suitable employment opportunities for them is more likely to produce job outcomes for those on the caseloads of Inclusive Employment Australia and Workforce Australia than current approaches.

Overall, the evidence suggests that employment services should work closely and strategically with employers to build inclusive workplaces and flexible employment opportunities for jobseekers with diverse skills and needs in ways that explicitly add value to the employer's business. Success at a population level hinges on connecting employers to this untapped talent pool.