



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

Evidence synthesis resource list

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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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Resource list

Summary

This resource list supports the report, *‘What works’ in employment services and supports for mature-age jobseekers with health conditions and acquired disability*. (See methodology of Final report, page 30.)

The list includes recommended resources to support ‘understanding this cohort’ and the ‘building blocks to employment’. Each has been evaluated for **rigour** and **relevance** to employment services and supports for people aged 45-64 with acquired disability and health conditions using the Australian Education Research Organisation Standards of Evidence (2022) shown in Figure 1.

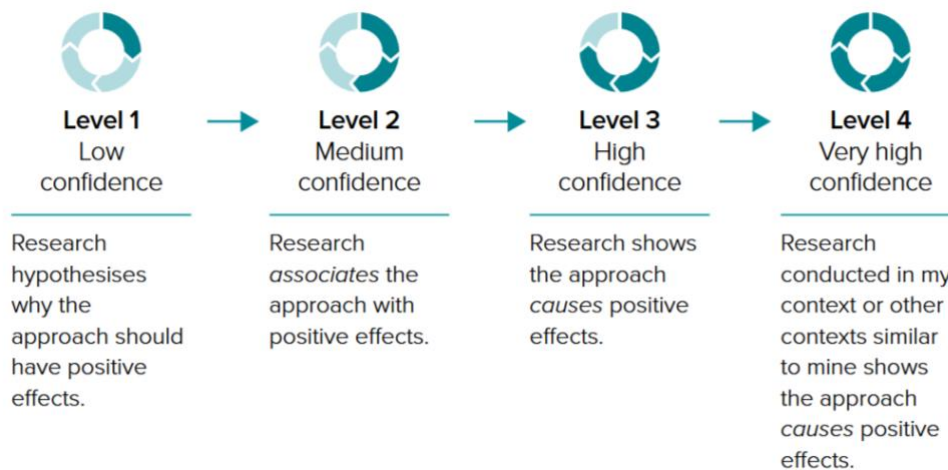


Figure 1: Australian Education Research Organisation (2022) Standards of Evidence

The evidence reviewed in this report is rigorous. Through this evidence synthesis, it was clear that gaps in evidence remain at the nexus of shifting individual, organisational and structural factors of disability, health, ageing, income support and employment shaping the working lives of people aged 45-64 with disability in Australia. ***This precludes confident alignment between cause and effect in the delivery of employment services and supports***

The evidence reviewed revealed the breadth of foundational work still required to clarify what shapes the lives and livelihoods of Australians aged 45-64 with disability and ill-health in different locations and contexts, including at the intersection of disability services and supports with the health system, ageing, the welfare system and employment. Without this work, questions about how employment services can best help those who are unemployed find and keep work cannot be answered with confidence.

Using the Standards of Evidence in this context

As shown in Figure 1, the Australian Education Research Organisation Standards of Evidence (2022) calls for a rating between Level 1 and Level 4, based on the surety with which evidence is proven to have causative effect.

This rating combines two evaluative judgements, around the rigour of the evidence, based on the research methods and their impact, and the relevance of the evidence, based on the context in which the research has been trialled and its association with the context it relates to in this evidence synthesis.

As research focused on mature-age jobseekers with acquired disability and/or chronic health conditions is limited, the resources recommended in this section relate to specific aspects relevant to the cohort.

This means that relevance may be theoretical relationship to this cohort based on similar cohorts and what may work or is likely to work. In the absence of Australian trials, these resources cannot be rated Level 4.



Resources

Q1: What 'works' in employment services and supports for mature-age jobseekers with health conditions and acquired disability?

This includes ways of working, activities, strategies and ingredients for delivering appropriate and relevant services (to job seekers and employers) that result in employment and retention of this cohort in the labour market.

Understanding this cohort

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1–4
Job Demands and Accommodation Planning Tool (JDAPT)	<p>Informed by research by Accommodating and Communicating about Episodic Disabilities (ACED) (n.d.) on Accommodating and Communicating about Episodic Disabilities (ACED) Partnership Project at the Institute for Work & Health in Canada, 2016-2025, developing evidence-based workplace tools to support sustained employment for people with episodic disabilities, including evaluation of its efficacy in the Canadian context through interviews with 69 employees and employers (Gignac, Bowring et al., 2023) and pre- post-use surveys with a baseline of 269 workers (188 completed all three surveys) (Gignac, Bowring et al., 2025).</p> <p>These tools are for workers with chronic and episodic conditions, people supporting them and employers. They support people to identify potential strategies and accommodations specific to the employee and day-to-day job requirements.</p> <p>The free tools are:</p>	Level 3 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 4)

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1–4
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>JDAPT for workers</u>, 2. <u>JDAPT to support a worker</u>, and 3. <u>JDAPT for a job</u>. <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These resources identify adaptations and strategies that are likely to work for people with different disability-related needs in the workplace. • These tools relate to workers with disability of all ages. • While research into whether differences exist for mature-age workers is required, as these tools focus on effect and not diagnosis, they are likely to be relevant to mature-age jobseekers. • These tools were created based on research developed in the Canadian context. 	
<p>The employer handbook</p>	<p>Published by Deaf Connect (2025), this toolkit is informed by research commissioned by Deaf Connect in partnership with Deakin University relating to the experiences, challenges, and opportunities for Deaf people within the workplace.</p> <p>This handbook provides evidence-based resources to empower employers to recruit, retain, and support deaf and hard-of-hearing employees.</p> <p>Downloading the free handbook/toolkit requires registration via the website. The Signs of Success website also includes information and videos for employers about supporting these valuable employees.</p> <p>The project also includes short documentary interviews with various organisations across Australia providing examples of how Australian workplaces have engaged inclusive practices and supportive leadership for Deaf individuals to pursue fulfilling careers.</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific to deaf and hard-of-hearing employees. 	<p>Level 1 (Rigour: 1; relevance: 2)</p>

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1–4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This handbook relates to employees of all ages. • Limited information about methodology, rationale, design, respondents and analysis published, raising questions about the process and rigour of the research (Deakin University, 2024). 	

Building blocks to employment

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
Flex Plus	<p>Informed by UK-based research led by Catherine Hale and peers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project (CIIP), phase 1: a survey of 2,000+ disabled people; phase 2: in-depth discussion of 20 participants (Hale, Benstead et al., 2021; Hale, Ruddock et al., 2025); • a survey of 300+ people who have left the workforce due to long-term ill-health (Hale, Francis et al., 2023); and • interviews and focus groups with 27 organisational leaders and researchers/consultants (Hale, Hoque et al., 2025). <p>A proposed rethink of changing work to enable people with disability – especially those with energy limiting conditions – to work productively and sustainably, including ‘a combination of remote working, worktime flexibility and part-time hours’.</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These proposed flexible working arrangements are yet to be trialled in practice at scale. • This proposal includes jobseekers of all ages. 	<p>Level 2 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 3)</p>

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although likely transferrable to the Australian context, this work is currently specific to the UK context and requires further investigation in an Australian context to ascertain its potential success in this environment. While specific to a large sub-group of people with disability and health conditions, it does not relate to all people with disability. 	

Q2: What demonstrates effective culture and practice for employment-service-provider organisations and service staff when responding to the needs of people with health conditions and disability seeking employment?

Understanding this cohort

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
Maximising Potential: Findings from the Mature Workers in Organisations Survey (MWOS)	<p>Informed by Australian research by the ARC Centre of Excellence in Population Ageing Research (CEPAR) (2019) including a survey of 2009 Australian workers aged 18 – 81, using workers under the age of 45 as a comparison group to the group of interest. The researchers state that while the spread of jobs included is similar to national samples, ‘caution should be exercised when making inferences from this study to the Australian population’ (p. 4).</p> <p>This report outlines mature-age employees’ perception of organisational practices and their lived experience of three key workplace themes: include, individualise and integrate.</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study relates to mature-age employees already in the workplace. 	Level 1 (Rigour: 3; relevance: 2)

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study includes employees with and without disability. This study does not adjust for life-stage or individual circumstances (i.e.: likelihood of having older children or being more experienced in the workplace) (p. 15). 	

Building blocks to employment

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence, Levels 1-4
Flex Plus	<p>Informed by UK-based research led by Catherine Hale and peers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> on the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project (CIIP), phase 1: a survey of 2,000+ disabled people; phase 2: in-depth discussion of 20 participants (Hale et al., 2021; Hale, Ruddock, et al., 2025); a survey of 300+ people who have left the workforce due to long-term ill-health (Hale et al., 2023); and interviews and focus groups with 27 organisational leaders and researchers/consultants (Hale, Hoque, et al., 2025). <p>This tool provides examples of succinct professional profiles for skilled jobseekers with disability stating the person's expertise, condition and requirements, which lends itself to quickly and effectively communicating the needs of mature-age jobseekers with existing work experience and their needs as they re-enter the workforce.</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This proposal relates to people across the labour force. A specific trial with mature-age jobseekers would provide more targeted information for the group of focus in this report. This proposal relates to a model of job placement for people with energy-limiting conditions in the UK context. A trial specific to the Australian context would provide a stronger indication of causality and success. 	<p>Level 2 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 3)</p>

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence, Levels 1-4
<p>Making Employment Work for People with Long-Term Conditions</p>	<p>Informed by UK-based research led by Catherine Hale and peers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project (CIIP), phase 1: a survey of 2,000+ disabled people; phase 2: in-depth discussion of 20 participants (Hale et al., 2021; Hale, Ruddock, et al., 2025); • a survey of 300+ people who have left the workforce due to long-term ill-health (Hale et al., 2023); and • interviews and focus groups with 27 organisational leaders and researchers/consultants (Hale, Hoque, et al., 2025). <p>This video includes information introducing the employment needs of people with energy limiting conditions, as well as their barriers to entering and remaining in the labour market. It enables employment service providers to understand and meet the needs of this large cohort, estimated to be more than one third of all people with disabilities (Astriid, 2023). This is important as people in the 2023 study strongly indicated their desire for an employer who understands long-term conditions (Hale et al., 2023).</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This resource is not specific to the barriers and experiences of mature-age jobseekers. • This resource relates to experiences of people with disability in the UK context. 	<p>Level 2 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 3)</p>

Q3: What differences, if any, exist in employment services practice for specific cohorts of mature-age job seekers with health conditions and disability?

For example, people in regional and remote areas, specific health conditions or disability types, people with multiple social identities.


Understanding this cohort

Resource	Description	Standard of evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
<p>Making employment work for people with long term conditions: Evidence from the frontline</p>	<p>UK-based Astriid is a charity and employment services provider that connects people with long-term energy-limiting conditions with meaningful work.</p> <p>Informed by UK-based research led by Catherine Hale and peers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on the Chronic Illness Inclusion Project (CIIP), phase 1: a survey of 2,000+ disabled people; phase 2: in-depth discussion of 20 participants (Hale et al., 2021; Hale, Ruddock, et al., 2025), and • a survey of 300+ people who have left the workforce due to long-term ill-health (Hale et al., 2023). <p>This report includes an overview of the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • barriers to employment for this group of job seekers, • need to rethink employment support services, and • needed action from employers to increase job opportunities. <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This report relates to people across the labour force. A specific trial with mature-age jobseekers would provide more targeted information for the group of focus in this report. • This report relates to job seeking in the UK context. A trial specific to the Australian context would provide a stronger indication of causality and success. 	<p>Level 2 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 3)</p>

Building blocks to employment

Resource	Description	Standard of Evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
<p>Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEAS)</p>	<p>Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA) (2026) is a Canadian-based organisation promoting stronger, more inclusive labour markets founded on rewarding, sustainable careers for people with disability.</p> <p>Working on the demand side, supporting employers through policy, guidance and tools to advance their capacity to recruit, hire, onboard, retain, mentor and promote persons with disabilities across the full range of employment opportunities.</p> <p>The project includes several reports underpinned by research conducted as part of the initiative, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hiring persons with disabilities and support needs in public sector organizations: Reflection guide on staffing practices (Martin, 2026) • Improving workplace disability inclusion through EDIA training (including a curated list of equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility training resources for employers and managers) (Inclusive Design for Employment Access (IDEA), n.d.) • Culture change towards accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities (Tompa, Irvin et al., 2022) <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toolkit and research is specific to the Canadian context. • This proposal relates to people of all ages across the Canadian labour force. A specific trial with mature-age jobseekers in the Australian context would provide more targeted information for the group of focus in this report. • The tools relate to people with a range of disabilities and are not specific to acquired disabilities and associated context. 	<p>Level 1 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 3)</p>

Resource	Description	Standard of Evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
<p>Workplace Intervention for Sustainable health and Employment Support (WISHES)</p>	<p>There is limited public information regarding the research informing this project. This research project exploring job crafting in the UK is funded by the NHS and is currently underway. It focuses on optimising demands; seeking resources; and seeking challenge for employees with disability, ensuring jobs meet both the person's needs and the needs of the organisation (National Institute for Health and Care Research, n.d.).</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited information available about the research underpinning this initiative. • Specific to the UK-employment sector; further trialling to understand its applicability to the Australian employment services sector is required. 	<p>Level 1 (Rigour: 1; relevance: 3)</p>
<p>Crippling The Exhaustion Economy</p>	<p>Building on the work pioneered by Hale into energy-limiting conditions (Hale et al., 2021), this UK-based project investigates how to overcome exhaustion in academia. The research is currently underway. It is led by Beth Evans of the University of Liverpool through the Independent Social Research Foundation (Evans, Ruddock et al., 2026) and is in the process of analysing interviews and focus groups with academics with energy-limiting conditions who are either currently employed or have left academia. The project aims to reimagine academic practices in ways that save energy with the goal of redefining the academic sector to reduce sectoral issues with overwork and employee burnout.</p> <p>Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research is specific to the academic sector, rather than disability experience across industries and sectors. • The employees with disability will be experienced and highly qualified, as they have been employed in academia long enough to experience burnout. This is not common across all mature-age workers with acquired disability or health conditions. 	<p>Level 1 (Rigour: 4; relevance: 3)</p>



Resource	Description	Standard of Evidence review and synthesis Levels 1-4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age range is not restricted in the sampling frame, meaning that while the sample is likely to be skewed toward mature-age workers, there will be people outside of that age group included. • This research will be UK-specific and findings will need to be interpreted and applied to the Australian context. 	

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