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Background

Employers play an important role in improving work participation rates for people experiencing a temporary or permanent physical or psychological health condition or disability. This includes prevention and rehabilitation, the recruitment, support and accommodation of employees.

A large number of working age Australians experience periods of temporary or permanent work incapacity due to ill health, disability or injury. **6.5 million** people accessed employer provided leave entitlements for short periods of work incapacity with an additional **786,000¹** people receiving income support from a Commonwealth, State, Territory or private source in the year 2015-16.

Australia has 10 major income and benefit support systems that provide support to people who are unable to work due to injury, illness or disability. These systems include leave entitlements provided by employers, workers compensation, life insurance, social security, motor vehicle accident compensation, superannuation and defense and veterans' compensation.

Individuals enter these systems with a wide range of health conditions ranging from mild illness resulting in a sick leave day to serious acquired disability with life-long consequences for participation in employment.

Employer provided entitlements are considered the largest system of Australia's 10 major income and benefit support systems in terms of recipients and expenditure.

Employer provided entitlements are usually accessed in cases of temporary illness or personal matters. A national standard of 10 days sick leave is available to most workers. In the year 2015-16, employer provided leave entitlements had an expenditure of \$18.7b. Social security is the second biggest system of income and benefit support with 469,000 recipients and an expenditure of \$8.6 billion¹.

Whilst employers provide direct access to employer provided entitlements, an individual's employer is **one of nine factors** that influences a person's ability to access systems of income and benefit support.

Employers are considered a formal support for employees' accessing the income and benefit support systems, employers who provide a support network have a positive impact on people as they access the systems whilst an unsupportive employer is considered a negative experience for individuals encountering income support systems.

Employers who maintain positive engagement with employees experiencing health conditions can prevent long term unemployment.

Whilst employers may not have the resources, capability or willingness to provide good work, an employers' past experience in hiring people with a health condition or disability drives a greater openness to recruiting people experiencing similar conditions in the future.

The Collaborative Partnership to Improve Work Participation

Founded in 2017 and operating until 2023, the Collaborative Partnership to improve work participation was a national system-wide collaboration of organisations working together to improve the health and work participation outcomes of working age Australians. They are: Comcare, the Insurance Council of Australia, the National Disability Insurance Agency, Department of Health and Aged Care, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Department of Social Services, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, EML, the Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, the Royal Australian College of Physicians, the National Mental Health Commission and the Transport Accident Commission.

Research of the Collaborative Partnership identifies the behaviours, attitudes and intentions of employers in Australia towards recruiting, supporting and accommodating people with health conditions or disabilities.

¹ [The Cross Sector Project.](#)

Research undertaken on employers

The Collaborative Partnership has undertaken research to understand employer behaviours, attitudes, and intentions towards recruiting, supporting and accommodating people who are experiencing a temporary or permanent physical or psychological health condition or disability. Research projects include:

Employer mobilisation

A survey of 2,457 people involved in hiring and management of staff and/or development of staff policies and initiatives across private and public sector. The survey examined the attitudes, barriers and enablers to improving employer capacity to provide work opportunities for people with health conditions or disability and identified six key employer segments. A further 35 in-depth interviews were conducted to gain rich insight into the six employer segments with regard to the employers' experiences, confidence and capacity to support people with a health condition or disability. An evidence review of empowerment interventions was also undertaken.

For the full report refer to [page 17](#).

National Scan and Analysis of Employment Services

The Collaborative Partnership commissioned Swinburne University to conduct a national scan and analysis to map the employment support interventions available for people with work restrictions related to disability, injury and illness in Australia. Employment services are offered by government departments and agencies, insurers, regulators, employers and community-based organisations with the aim of supporting people with work restriction to participate in good work. The scan further defined employment supports, compared contexts and focuses of delivery and identified eligibility criteria and ingredients of efficacy. The project provided insights into the complex space of employment services and the large number of supports and services available to employers.

An original Typology of Employment Support Interventions was developed as part of the project.

For the full report and the Typology refer to [page 17](#).

Employee Awareness and Empowerment

This project was undertaken to address an important gap in evidence on empowerment strategies for people with a health condition or disability to use work as part of their recovery.

The project explored the attitudes and needs of people with lived experience to determine how they navigated Australia's benefit and income support systems, and their interactions with health providers and employers. The project interviewed 10 professionals working in related sectors, systems and industries. The project identified best opportunities for empowerment with relevance to employers.

For the full report refer to [page 17](#).



What was learnt about employers

The role of an employer

Employers are considered a formal support that provides a positive impact on people as they access income and benefit support systems. Whilst employers generally contribute to positive experiences, an unsupportive employer is considered a negative experience for individuals encountering income support systems.

The critical role of employers in prevention and rehabilitation was noted by interviewees of Collaborative Partnership research and is supported by analysis of published research.

Employers play a role in ensuring they uphold their obligations and best practice including implementing non-discriminatory employment processes and offering reasonable work adjustment for their employees.

Employers tend to be neutral

Research of the Collaborative Partnership has identified that most employers feel relatively 'neutral' about employing someone, or having someone work for them, who may be experiencing a temporary or permanent physical or psychological condition or disability. Noting that employers are significantly more open to employing people with temporary conditions than permanent conditions.

Employer willingness

Employers are open to employing people with health conditions or disability as long as they fit seamlessly into the workplace, without requiring adjustment.

When asked about the advantages of employing someone with a health condition or disability, only 1 in 10 employers noted the benefits for employers. The most common benefit cited was a benefit to the employee themselves.

Employers that are resistant to the idea of recruiting people with a health condition or disability focus on the condition and imagine ways in which it will cause them issues, rather than taking the time and effort to consider the specifics of an individual's situation.

Only 50% of employers were confident in their organisation's ability to support a person with a physical health condition to be an effective contributor to the company.

The four predictive factors of future willingness

Organisational factors positively correlated with future willingness to recruit, retain and support return to work for people with disability or with a health condition, these include:

1. Recent experience employing a person with a health condition or disability.
2. A positive psychosocial work environment.
3. An investment approach to personal wellbeing (going beyond compliance with workplace health and safety legislation).
4. Strategic flexibility in structuring work.



The role of experience

Past experience in hiring people with a health condition or disability drives a greater openness to recruiting people experiencing similar conditions in the future.

- Actual experiences in hiring and supporting staff members with serious conditions and disability helps to break down barriers of conscious or unconscious biases that often accompany employer perspectives on health conditions and disability.
- Managers who had employed people with disability tended to have done so by default or accident, being unaware at the time of hiring.
- Past experience leads to greater openness in future recruitment, highlighting the benefits that can come from having a more diverse workplace.
- Less than 50% of organisations have managed processes for recruiting, accommodating or handling the return to work for someone with disability or a health condition. Most commonly for temporary conditions.

Organisational culture

Culture and social norms provide the over-arching context and motivation that makes individual interventions effective. Strong cultures are typically built on shared values with the mindset of investment as opposed to compliance.

There is a strong relationship between the overall psychosocial work environment and employer willingness and openness to consider hiring people experiencing serious conditions.

Organisations with positive psychosocial work environments are roughly twice as likely to be extremely open to the idea of recruiting or hiring someone with a permanent physical health condition or disability, and four times as likely to be open to hiring someone with a permanent psychological condition or disability.

Only 1 in 5 employers could identify the benefits of employing someone with a health condition or disability. When prompted many were able to identify people with a health condition or disability within their organisation.

A survey of 2,457 people involved in hiring and management of staff found that:

- **41%** of employers struggle to see how supporting people with a temporary or permanent physical or mental illness/injury should be their focus.
- **53%** believe their workplace culture is not supportive of people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition.
- **47%** felt their organisational culture was supportive for employees with a disability or a health condition.
- **36%** felt their organisation had the capacity to adapt the workplace for employees with disability or a health condition.

Characteristics of an employers openness to employing people with disability

Not open	Open
Inflexible and rigid	Flexible and adaptive
Chaotic and unstructured	Strong policies and procedures
Risk averse	Optimises risk
Dismissive	Opportunistic
Sees disability	Sees whole person
Manages output	Manages quality of work-life

Lack of formal or informal policies or initiatives

Employers are only prepared to employ someone with a disability or health condition where there are supports to help them with this.

Only a small proportion of employers have formal and informal policies in place to accommodate people with a disability in relation to return to work, retention and recruitment.

- Larger organisations in the public sector are more likely to have policies in place.
- Public sector organisations are more likely to have formalised policies.
- Informal policies and policies around return to work are most common.
- 3 in 10 employers use processes or modifications to help employ or accommodate people with a disability, ie. modifications of tasks.

Employers need and want practical support to employ and maintain people with a health condition or disability in the workplace. Assistance in the form of wage subsidies, employment funds or reimbursement funds are seen as relatively useful.

- Employers awareness of the various initiatives was moderate to low.
- Employers need trusted support in how to provide work accommodation in order to support work participation.
- Web resources were rated the least useful.
- There are over 160 employment services created, funded and operating across sectors with most having touch points with employers.

Supporting work participation

Employers play a powerful role in supporting employees to return to work and have the potential to improve health and work function through workplace health promotion, injury and illness prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Good work is engaging, fair, respectful and balances job demands, autonomy and job security.

Good work accepts the importance of culture and traditional beliefs. It is characterised by safe and healthy work practices, and it strikes a balance between the interests of individuals, employers and society. However, not all employers are aware of the health benefits of good work and how to support work participation.

Employers play a role in making work adjustments and matching the job to the individual by working together with the individuals General Practitioner (GP) who identifies work capacity and functional ability.

- **65%** of employers agreed that work brings a lot to peoples lives.
- **59%** agreed that a healthy society is when everyone who wants a job can get one.
- **49%** agreed that it is hard to have a high quality of life without work.

48% of employers indicated that they would be very likely to provide alternative duties for 3 months to help someone with a health condition or disability to return to work.



Company characteristics

Company characteristics including the number of employees and industry, may influence the capacity and delivery of return-to-work services.

Whilst most employees access healthcare and treatment through Medicare, the PBS and/or private health insurance, some employers may provide healthcare and treatment direct to employees. For example, many large employers provide access to Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for preventative healthcare.

Resourcing constraints

The main barrier to providing alternative duties is a lack of skills required to manage the process. Those interviewed indicated that senior managers (followed by HR Departments) should be responsible for ensuring participation in the workforce.

There is a wide variation in the activities of employers related to prevention, health promotion and rehabilitation, partly due to the size and level of resourcing available.

Workplace accommodation

Workplace accommodation is about making changes to the workplace or the way that work is done to allow all people the opportunity to work according to their capacity. Workplace accommodation can include changes in work schedules and organisation, the work environment, assistance and changes in commuting to and from the workplace.

Work accommodation is seen as the most effective intervention according to the evidence and employee and stakeholder responses. The direct costs associated with workplace accommodations are often low, however work accommodations are rare, when used the most common type is flexible scheduling and reduced hours.

There is strong evidence that multi-domain interventions including a combination of health focused interventions, service coordination interventions and work modification interventions (including workplace modifications) reduce time away from work.

An investment approach

Employers that invest in productivity are far less closed to the idea of employing people with serious health conditions or disability.

- **42%** of employers described their company aims in relation to maintaining the health of its employees as 'compliance only', that is, the employer does what is required to comply with Work Health and Safety and Fair Work law.
- **18%** indicated they go beyond compliance to invest in health for expected productivity returns, more common amongst larger employers.
- **31%** believed they go beyond workplace productivity, to ensure employees have access to everything they need to have a happy, healthy life.



Improved communication with stakeholders

Stakeholders involved in improving work participation for individuals include GPs, other medical and health practitioners, case managers, employers, benefit or income support providers and government agencies that adequately support people to enter into, remain at, or return to good work.

To see an improvement in the number of people with a disability or health condition participating in good work, stakeholders will need to communicate more effectively as a team to recognise the health benefits of good work, the adverse health effects of long-term unemployment and agree on a person-centred model of care.

For an employer this could include providing information and support to the GP by actively supporting reasonable work adjustment and ensuring readiness by line managers and peers for employment, retention or return to work of people with work disability.

It is understood there is varying capability and capacity amongst stakeholders.

Among employers who were surveyed

50%

are not confident in their businesses **ability to support** people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition

53%

believe their **workplace culture** is supportive of people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition

36%

believe their workplace has **low culture** to accommodate people with a physical or psychological disability or health condition

An employee's perspective

Research has indicated that employees are motivated to work, and their motivation is not a barrier to participation. Employees believe that:

- Employers often lack understanding of the work ability of people with a health condition or disability and how to effectively accommodate them.
- Employers provide insufficient support or work accommodation beyond temporary reduction of hours or lighter duties.
- Employers use recruitment methods that are not inclusive to applicants with a disability.
- Very few employers are willing to accommodate people with health conditions or disabilities despite the right jobs existing.

'Employers play such a pivotal role in people trying to stay at work'¹

Employer Segmentation

There are six employer segments that differ in their openness to employing people with serious health conditions and disability, their capacity to support someone with serious health conditions or disability and the supportiveness of their culture, among a range of other characteristics.

Segmentation is as a continuum of Australian employers, from low capacity and capability to support or accommodate those with serious health condition or disability to those organisations that are leading the way and creating positive change for their employees.



¹ Employee Awareness and Empowerment Research Report, December 2019.

This is a 'stages of change' model that indicates a path to greater engagement, from starting out as 'Not A Priority' to becoming a 'Flexible Leader'.

The segmentation is best understood as a 'stages of change' model that indicates a path to greater engagement from 'Not A Priority' to 'Flexible Leader'

	Key characteristics	Barriers	Opportunities to progress	Potential interventions
 4%	<p>Flexibility Leaders are significantly more likely to feel accommodating, eager, hopeful, optimistic and unfazed</p> <p>They practice strategic flexibility in structuring the workplace and roles, and see the whole person when hiring</p>	<p>Some positions do not allow much flexibility</p> <p>Limited financial means to invest in workplace reconfiguration</p>	<p>Build on experience and encourage/help them tackle issues</p> <p>Encourage the formalisation of policies</p>	<p>Convert into advocates</p>
 18%	<p>Stumble Before Run are more likely to have had experience with hiring people with disability, but encountered issues or hurdles while doing so</p> <p>They are passive when it comes to recruiting and supporting people with disability and health conditions, despite having suitable roles</p>	<p>Physical incapability—rough worksites, no lifts</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p> <p>Have experience at organisational—not necessarily at individual—level</p> <p>Tend to see the disability rather than the person</p>	<p>Build on experience and encourage/help them tackle issues</p> <p>Encourage the formalisation of policies</p>	<p>Build on experience. Help them tackle issues.</p> <p>Encourage the formalisation of policies.</p>
 8%	<p>Building Momentum have had difficulty filling positions, which has increased willingness to look outside the box to find and keep the right people</p> <p>They are open to supporting people with health conditions and disabilities, but expect employees to fit into the company</p>	<p>Limited ability to adapt the environment or work process to suit individual employees</p> <p>Environmental constraints</p> <p>Concerns that people with pre-existing injuries are a liability</p> <p>Lack support of senior management</p>	<p>Help build capacity</p> <p>Encourage development of formal policies and initiatives</p> <p>Model and share success stories</p>	<p>Help build capacity.</p> <p>Encourage development of formal policies and initiatives.</p> <p>Model success stories.</p>
 12%	<p>Starting The Path are interested and alert to the idea of change and acknowledge their organisations are resistant to change</p>	<p>No suitable jobs</p> <p>Lack of leadership and resourcing</p> <p>Physical incapability</p> <p>Fear of the unknown</p>	<p>Inform about available supports</p> <p>Link to services and like-minded businesses</p>	<p>Inform about available support.</p> <p>Link to services.</p> <p>Encourage development of formal policies and initiatives.</p> <p>Model success stories.</p>
 17%	<p>Curious and Looking For Direction are more likely to suggest their company's aim is 'compliance'</p> <p>They have little insight or interest in pursuing available support</p>	<p>'Red tape' hurdles with worksite compliance</p> <p>Risk management relating to both hiring and injury</p> <p>Physical incapability</p>	<p>Sell benefits and provide incentives to spark engagement</p> <p>Share case studies of similar organisations</p>	<p>Sell benefits.</p> <p>Provide incentives.</p> <p>Inform about available support.</p> <p>Link to services.</p> <p>Encourage development of formal policies or initiatives.</p> <p>Model success stories.</p>
 41%	<p>Not A Priority feel it is important that they accommodate temporary physical (39%) and psychological (34%) conditions. This proportion decreased for permanent conditions (22%, 17%)</p>	<p>Belief that people with a disability or health condition pose a risk</p> <p>Lack of support from management</p> <p>Lack of flexibility and budget to modify workplace; A focus on 'bare minimum' compliance</p>	<p>Need direct support and encouragement to begin journey</p> <p>Provide templated policies and procedures</p> <p>Use of compliance/regulations to enforce engagement</p>	<p>Need direct support and encouragement to begin journey.</p> <p>Sell benefits.</p> <p>Provide incentives.</p> <p>Provide templated policies and procedures.</p> <p>Use of compliance 'stick' regulations.</p>

*weighted proportion of businesses in the Australian business population

Flexibility Leaders view the workforce through the lens of possibilities and solutions. Employees are viewed as individuals who each bring a unique perspective and skillset— they recognise that every individual brings their own set of challenges and idiosyncrasies and they do not differentiate between those with or without a disability.

Those employers who are classified in this study as 'Flexibility Leaders' were two-and-a-half times as likely to say their organisation was rapidly growing, while at the other end of the spectrum, the 'Not A Priority' were twice as likely to say their organisation was shrinking compared with all employers surveyed.

System engagement

Australia's 10 income and benefit support systems attempt to engage and influence employers, however the approach to employer engagement is fragmented and system specific and is unlikely to yield significant results in the short to medium term.

Common challenges raised by employers

Employers raised the following challenges:

- Having a lack of understanding or education of disability and work accommodation.
- Not considering job design beyond basic modification.
- Smaller businesses express stronger concerns around lack of support and resources.
- Prevalence of unconscious bias and a focus on limitations and constraints.
- Hidden disability and confidentiality means the scope of disability in the businesses is unknown.
- The positive impact on workplace morale is easily understood, however businesses are less likely to assume that there can be a productivity benefit.
- Policies and practices across hiring, retention and RTW are often separated and are a barrier to holistic staff wellbeing.

Key barriers to recruiting and supporting people with a health condition or disability

Employers cited the following significant barriers to the recruitment and support of people with health conditions or disability in the workplace:

Fear of the unknown

- Less than half of employers have managed processes for recruiting, accommodating or managing return to work of a person with a health condition or disability.
- Automatically thinking of the most extreme example of mental or physical ill health or disability and citing that as a reason why they won't employ people with physical or mental ill health or disability.
- Unsure the effect of hiring a person with disability may have.

Lack of leadership

- Only **27%** of employers agree that leadership in their organisation has a strong voice about inclusion of people with different abilities.
- Lack of support from senior management.

Lack of skills and resources

- The top ranked barriers to hiring someone with a health condition are the additional support required, the lack of skill required to manage the process and the cost of modifying the workplace.
- Limited budgets and/or ability to make modifications to the office or invest in adaptive technologies to support staff.
- Environmental constraints, such as not having lifts or wheelchair accessible bathrooms which limit their capacity to accommodate people in a wheelchair.
- Increasing pressure on both teams and individuals to meet performance measures and targets and pressures to cut staffing costs.
- A belief they were too small or lacked various roles that suit people with diverse skills and abilities.

Low confidence

- A lack of confidence.
- **23%** of employers believe that employees with a health condition or disability cannot complete the task or perform as efficiently as other colleagues.

Liability and compliance mindset

- **14%** of employers are concerned with the risk of injury in the workplace and more likely to do what is required to comply with the work health safety and fair work law.
- A focus on 'bare minimum' compliance with occupational health and safety rather than a proactive interest in encouraging the health and wellbeing of their staff.
- 'Red tape' hurdles with worksite compliance can make it difficult to find ways to integrate people with different abilities.
- The risk associated with a poor hiring decision and potential risks from having someone with a disability or serious health condition injure themselves or others.
- Concerns that people with pre-existing injuries, or those who are injured on the job, could become a liability.

Disability focus

- Employers who are resistant to the idea of hiring someone with a permanent health condition tend to see the disability rather than the individual as a whole.

Factors that can help employers overcome barriers to recruitment

- Stronger organisational change and leadership; clear directions and targets are needed
- Ensure systems do not exclude through the use of 'filters'
- Coaching and support from senior leadership
- Showing how other organisations have successfully achieved change through modelling
- Appropriate resourcing
- Demonstrate benefits to retention
- Demonstrate how organisations are employing people with mental and physical ill health and disabilities.

Employers want support with

- Retention through peer sharing
- Hiring policies and procedures
- Team culture
- Job design
- Identifying relevant roles
- Workplace policy
- Mental health education and management
- Education and training.

Potential benefits for employers

Reductions in the number of employees with health conditions affecting their work capacity, with associated improvements in productivity. Other benefits may include:

- Reductions in turnover
- 'Employer of choice' status
- Reduced costs of insurance.



Employer provided entitlements

Employer provided entitlements is the largest system of income and benefit support in Australia in terms of recipients and expenditure.

Employer provided entitlements are generally accessed in cases of temporary illness or personal matters. There is a national standard of 10 days sick leave per year in Australia that is available to most workers.

Employees told us that Australia's benefit and income support systems are

- Complex, overwhelming and frustrating
- Inflexible and unempathetic
- Lack transparency around decisions and processes
- Contribute to feelings of uncertainty
- Lack cohesion and adequate communication between systems as people move between systems
- Contribute to worsening health, greater reliance on the system and secondary conditions.

Challenges individuals face when accessing income support systems include

- Lack of initial employer support
- Difficulties fulfilling work requirements
- Physical and psychological burden
- Difficulties attending medical appointments
- Difficulties coming to terms with the decisions
- Reluctantly finishing paid employment
- Unable to continue in their position due to employer ultimatums.

System funding

Systems can be categorised according to how they are funded, for an employer this could include funding by employer payroll or through insurance premiums paid by an employer.

Who provides support

Short term absence is typically managed by an employee line manager, whilst longer term absences may be provided via in-house human resources or occupational health and safety staff, outsourced to a third-party provider, or via a combination of in-house and outsourced service providers.

Flow between systems

Most people have temporary periods of incapacity and return to work. It is important to recognise that the major flow is between the 'healthy at work' state and the upstream systems of employer entitlements, workers compensation, motor vehicle compensation and life insurance. That is, for many people the systems function well and support return to paid work. Some systems measure and report return to work rates, but others do not.



Opportunities

Employers are universally critical for prevention of illness and injury, rehabilitation and return to work, as well as supporting re-engagement of people with long-term incapacity in the workforce. Research undertaken by the Collaborative Partnership highlighted the best opportunities to shift employer behaviours and attitudes and improve employer capability and capacity.

Employers need to have employment of people with disability on their radar, whilst they may not be opposed to the idea of hiring people with disability, they are not likely to be thinking about it.

To increase an employer's capacity to employ people with disability, a change to the organisations structure and culture is often required.

Opportunities for employers

Adopt a test and learn mindset

Adopt a test and learn mindset is a key step in transitioning from ambition to action, combining curiosity with adaptability. 'It is critical that failures are recognised as inevitable and essential learning opportunities'.

Communicating experience fuels momentum

Creating awareness in the organisation of work being done can build momentum confidence and sense of permission to do more.

Employers that are categorised as Flexibility Leaders, who lead by example in this space can provide practical examples of success and help other organisations understand the attitudinal and behavioural steps to build workplace participation.

Managers are the key to success

Managers have the power to enable or block meaningful change depending on their mindset, experience and/or skillset.

Establish shared language and vision

Strong cultures are typically built on shared values or subscriptions to an investment mindset versus a compliance mindset.

Education and reframing a strengths-based culture

Reframing the deficit mindset, which sees disability and health conditions as a burden or limitation.

Top down leadership combined with permission to act

Success requires the endorsement of senior management. Creating a sense of ownership and responsibility beyond management can take engagement to another level.

Develop strong policies and procedures

Go beyond the legislated requirements for return to work or standard work and health safety procedures.

Adaptive nature

Willingness to accommodate and adapt to the unique needs of colleagues.

Organised and prepared

Seize the opportunity to recruit staff that offer a good fit for the organisation, skills to complete the required tasks and the right attitude.

Optimise risk

Have strategic flexibility in structuring work to make the most of employees' different abilities and find roles where the health condition can become an advantage.

See the person as a whole

Consider all employees as a package of characteristics. Don't focus on the health condition or disability to make assumptions about abilities and productivities.

Manage quality of life

A focus on total work health of employees. Provide facilities and opportunities to ensure employees can lead a happy, healthy life both at and outside of work. An investment approach to personal wellbeing. A positive psychosocial work environment.

Build experience

Past experiences in hiring and supporting staff members with serious conditions and disability drives a greater openness to recruiting people experiencing similar conditions in the future. Actual experiences help to break down the barriers of conscious or unconscious biases that so often accompany employer perspectives on health conditions and disability.

System wide opportunities

There is an opportunity to strengthen the support provided to employers, so they are better able to employ, retain and return people to work.

Knowing that the majority of people enter the system directly from paid work it is important employers are supported to retain employees with a temporary or ongoing work limitation wherever possible.

Opportunities include:

Cultural shift

A need for a broader cultural shift that helps all employers, large and small, to reduce and eliminate their prejudices in hiring decisions.

- Starting conversations and communicating the evidence of value to multiple levels including individuals, businesses and society can disrupt business as usual thinking.
- Appealing to the range of employer motivations is important to engage and signal relevance to the broad employer market.
- Alerting employers to the experience they may already have in accommodating existing staff with conditions or disabilities.

Build experience

A joint focus on engaging and influencing employers is to encourage all employers to make small change to gain/build on experience, with direct experience being the path to further experience.

Supports and incentives

- Government subsidies or financial incentives for organisations to support people with disabilities may be needed to motivate organisations to consider ways they could increase their capacity.
- Diversity training may help to change employer attitudes and encourage employers to think differently and creatively about how they could employ people with disability; however, this is unlikely to overcome the many barriers and excuses in place.
- Communications and interventions aimed at encouraging a broader approach to work health that incorporates a total worker health perspective to provide a greater opportunity for people experiencing health conditions or disability.
- Increase employer awareness for the types of supports available.
- Initiatives, such as "Employ My Ability", are likely to improve the confidence of employers around workers with temporary or ongoing work limitations.
- There is an opportunity for resources to be provided to employers to aid in identifying employees with health conditions who are still working, but who may be at risk of leaving the workplace.
- Create a resource portal to enable sharing of experiences, tools and processes of leaders. Including accessible materials in different formats and a simple directory to services and supports.

Effective communication of stakeholders

To see an improvement in the number of people with a disability or health condition participating in good work, GPs, employers, and other professionals need to communicate more effectively as a team to recognise the health benefits of good work and the adverse health effects of long-term unemployment and agree on a person-centred model of care.

Improvements in work and health outcomes cannot be solely addressed in a clinical or work setting and need support from employers, policymakers and the broader health and income support systems.

There is a need for employers to communicate more openly and effectively with stakeholders involved in supporting work participation.

GPs are ideally placed to promote the health benefits of good work and contextualise patient experiences.

Employers can support GPs to make evidence-based and timely recommendations by:

- Providing information on the psychosocial and physical work environment and health aspects of the role.
- Providing good work that supports work participation outcomes, drawing on input from GPs to ensure duties are adapted, graduated and suitable.
- Ensuring that roles are matched to the work abilities of people with physical and mental health conditions or disabilities.

There is a need for employers, insurers and policymakers to address broader barriers to work participation.

Opportunities for employer provided entitlements

Upstream systems

There is a major opportunity for primary prevention in the employer provided entitlements system.

The opportunity to make the greatest impact for individuals is in the upstream systems of income and benefit support. These systems are closer to the onset of health conditions and a person's exit from work, employer provided entitlements are considered an upstream system.

Interventions at this point reduce the flow into downstream systems (ie. social security) and reduce the overall burden of work incapacity in society.

For example an intervention that improves the health and well-being of workers while they are in work will reduce the number of workers who become ill and have long periods of work incapacity.

For all systems, including entitlements provided by an employer, there is a major opportunity for collaboration and cooperation to ensure the most effective and efficient approaches to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention are implemented.



Research reports

Employer mobilisation project

[Full report](#)

[Snapshot](#)

[Overview](#)

Employee Awareness

[Full report](#)

[Snapshot report](#)

National cross-sector scan and analysis of employment services

[Summary report](#)

[Typology of Employment Support Interventions](#)





Collaborative
Partnership
to improve work participation