

# Working with a health condition or disability

6.8 million working age people are disabled, or have a health condition that can make work challenging.<sup>1</sup>

This especially affects older people. 1 in 4 people aged 50-64 are disabled or have a health condition. As people work later in life, more of them will need to balance the demands of work and managing a health condition.

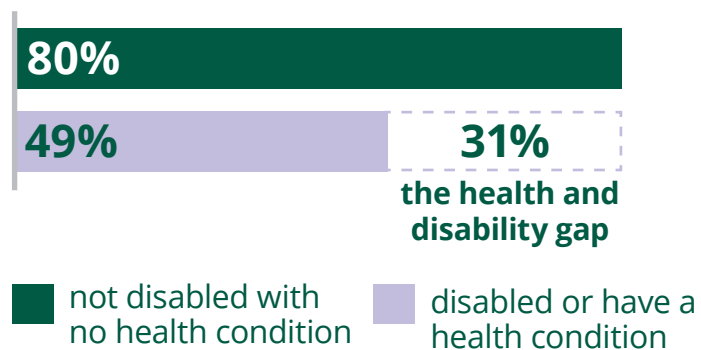
We need new approaches to help people stay in their jobs or find work that takes the challenges they face into account.

citizens  
advice

## The health and disability gap

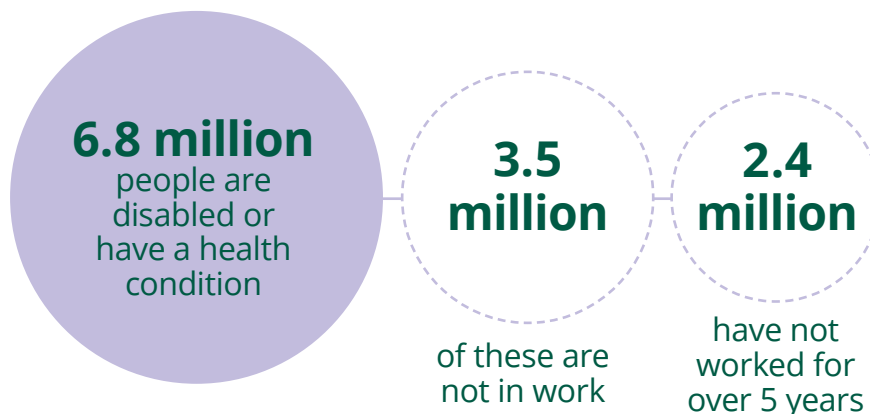
Some health conditions or impairments make paid work impossible, while others mean people can still be supported to do a job. Regardless, disabled people or those with health conditions are much less likely to be in work than others.

There is a 31% employment gap between people who are disabled or have a health condition and those that don't.



The health and disability gap has barely changed over the last decade. Even an increase in overall employment in the last 2 years hasn't made much difference.

### Of working age people in England & Wales



### Context

The government has outlined an aim to halve the disability employment gap.

This gap affects a wide range of people, including disabled people and those with conditions that might fluctuate or be hidden, such as depression or arthritis.

For this reason we are using the phrase 'health and disability gap' to better describe the issue.



## 1.4 million

disabled people or those with health conditions don't have a job but want to work

### The scale of the challenge

In order to halve the health and disability gap, over a million people will need to move into work. To achieve this, obstacles in the benefit and health systems need to be overcome. Attitudes of employers and society also need to change.

## Getting a job is harder for some people

The health and disability gap is not the same for everybody. It is larger for certain groups and in particular sectors. A targeted approach is needed to address these separate but overlapping issues.

### Employment rates by type of impairment or health condition

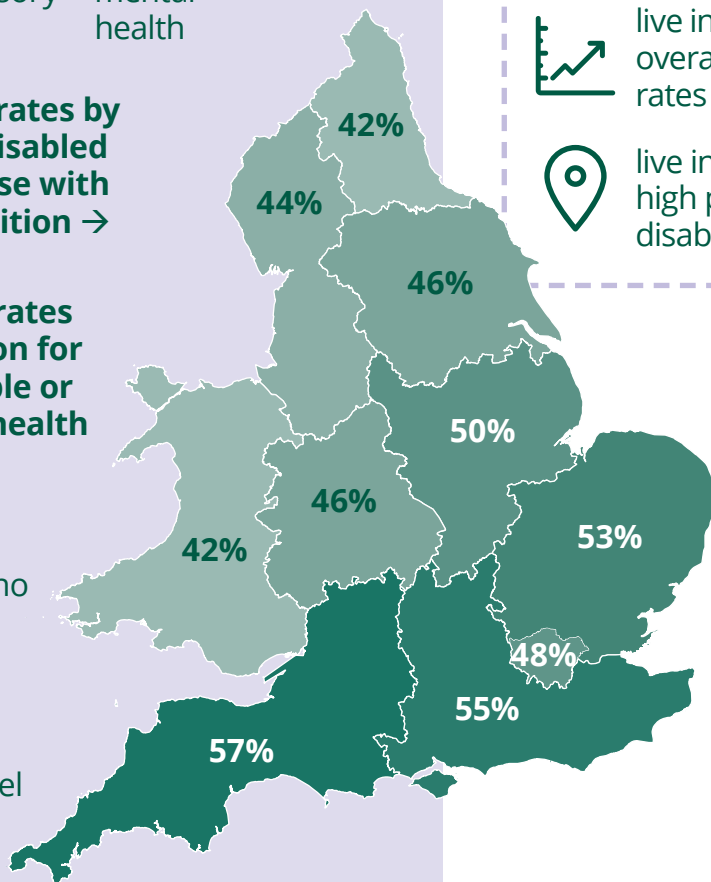
**53%** physical  
**53%** sensory  
**36%** mental health

### Employment rates by location for disabled people or those with a health condition →

### Employment rates by qualification for disabled people or those with a health condition

**19%**  
 for those with no qualifications

**68%**  
 for those with a university level qualification



Our research suggests that disabled people and people with health conditions are more likely to fall out of work in a given year if they:

-  have a mental health condition
-  work in caring, leisure or customer service roles
-  have low qualifications
-  live in areas with low overall employment rates
-  live in areas with a high proportion of disabled people

## Staying in work can be more difficult for disabled people or those with a health condition

Disabled people or those who have a health condition are twice as likely to stop working in any given year, but three times less likely to move back into work. To halve the health and disability gap, people who develop a health condition need support to stay in the jobs they have.



Of particular concern is the high rate of young people in these groups who fall out of work every year. For example, a person aged 25-29 is three times more likely to fall out of work if they are disabled or have a health condition (12% versus 4%).

Given many health conditions are chronic or lifelong, it is vital that young people get support to stay in work at an early stage. This can benefit them and their employer for the rest of their working lives.

# People need more support from employers and the benefits system

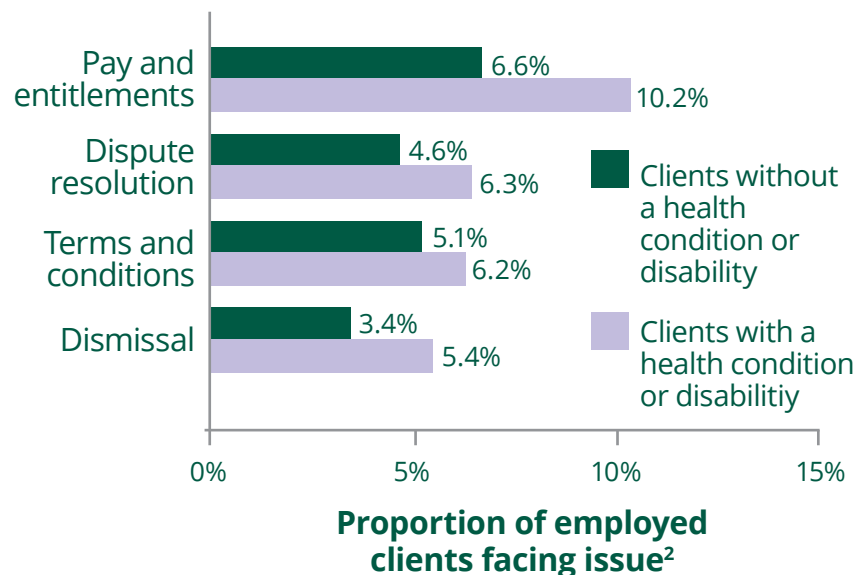
## Benefits system

Health and disability benefits are vital to give people a secure income and meet additional costs. For those who are temporarily out of work, benefits are important because they can provide a secure replacement for their income while they recover or look for a job.

At Citizens Advice, we help 273,000 people a year who need support with either their Employment Support Allowance or Personal Independence Payment claim. Making sure people can get these benefits reliably and quickly is a crucial first step in addressing the health and disability gap.

## Employers

Employers also have a crucial role to play by making sure they take a responsible attitude to employees. Our data suggests there is still too much bad practice and discrimination encountered by our clients who are disabled or have a health condition.



"There's no one size fits all solution to the health and disability employment gap.

"Employers may need to think about improving their sickness absence policies, or making it easier for people with health conditions to make changes to how and when they work."

**Kayley Hignell**  
Head of Policy at  
Citizens Advice

"I had to leave my call centre job of 8 years after I developed neurological problems which affect my vision. I often get migraines, and my thought processes have slowed a little.

"There were easy ways my employer could have helped me stay in work, like changing my duties to just being on the phone. It would have worked much better and solved the problem of me lagging behind."

**Lisa, 55**

# What's next?

**Too many people face a range of obstacles which need to be recognised to help them get and keep a job.**

**As part of our work on income security, Citizens Advice is looking at how to improve the financial and practical support from government to help people who can work to get a job and stay in work.**

**We will also be asking people about the experiences they face getting that support.**

**Finally we will be speaking to employers about the challenges they face in recruiting and retaining people and how these can be overcome.**

1. We use 'health condition' throughout this document to refer to health conditions that limit the amount or type of work an individual can carry out.

2. This excludes self-employed clients.

Sources: Analysis on the first two pages of this document is based on data for England and Wales from the Labour Force Survey. We present 2015 four-quarter averages for all but the 'staying in work' analysis which is calculated using data from April-June quarters in 2013, 2014 and 2015.

The statistics on this last page are based on internal Citizens Advice data from 2015/16.