

Work and health in Wales

In spite of a growing number of households in Wales experiencing in-work poverty there remains strong evidence that being in regular, fairly paid employment is a critical factor to increasing prosperity and reducing poverty.

Many people face additional barriers to finding and remaining in work. These can include a lack of appropriate skills and qualifications, poor access to public transport and affordable childcare, or managing other caring responsibilities.

People of working age with disabilities or long term health conditions are also much less likely to be in work than those without disabilities or health conditions.

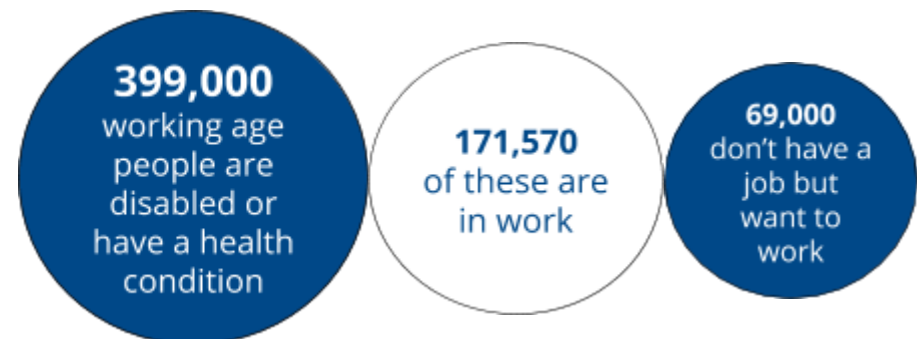
This paper draws on evidence from across the Citizens Advice network in Wales and other sources. It highlights some of the many challenges this group face when looking for and trying to stay in work.



Wales: health and disability employment gap

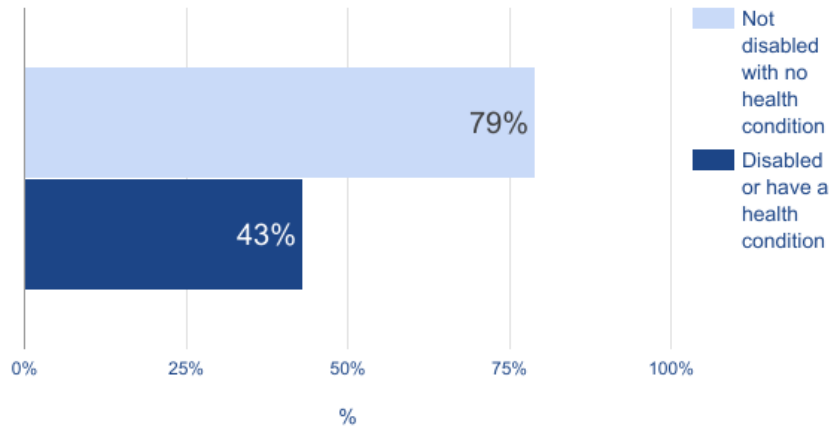
The UK Government has committed to halving the disability employment gap within the next decade. In their new programme for government, 'Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021', the Welsh Government has similarly committed to 'reshape employability support', particularly for those furthest from the labour market, including disabled people.

In Wales just 43% of working-age people with a disability or long-term health condition are currently in employment, compared to 79% of non-disabled people who don't have a health condition¹ - a health and disability employment gap of 36%. The equivalent UK gap is 32%.

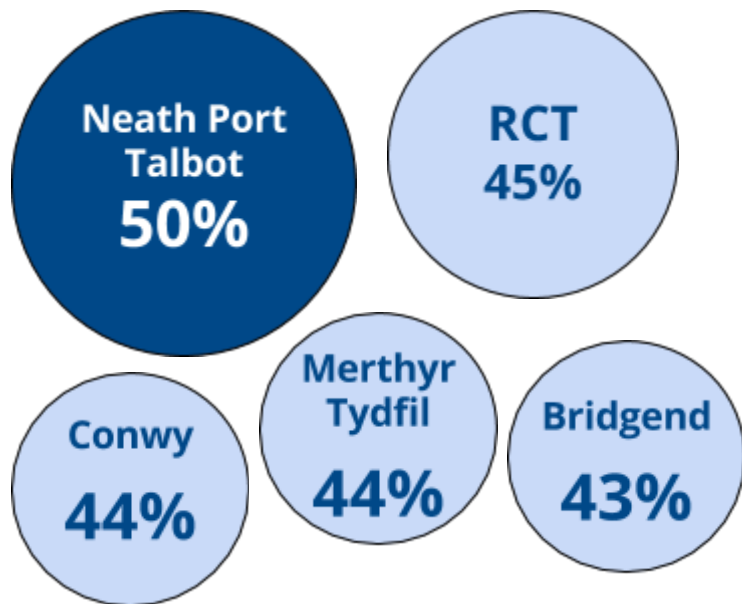


¹ StatsWales 'Summary of economic activity by area & disability status' (year ending 30 June 2016)

Wales has a health & disability employment gap of 36%



In some areas of Wales the gap is even bigger:



The size of the health and disability employment gap can also be dependent on other situations or circumstances. It is larger for people with a disability or health condition who have no or few qualifications, and for those with particular conditions, such as mental health problems or multiple impairments².

Employment rates by type of impairment or health condition and type of qualification³



In Wales, disabled people are also almost 3 times more likely to leave their job in any given year.

² 'Diverse disability', Richard Berthoud, ISER, University of Essex

³ Labour Force Survey (LFS), Q3 2016 & LFS Q2 2013, 2014, 2015

People need more support from the benefits system and employers

Benefits system

Health and disability benefits are vital to give working-age people living with a disability or long term health condition a secure income and help to meet additional living costs.

In 2015 to 2016 local Citizens Advice in Wales helped over 22,600 people with either their Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claim. This included helping more than 6,700 people to challenge/appeal a PIP or ESA decision.

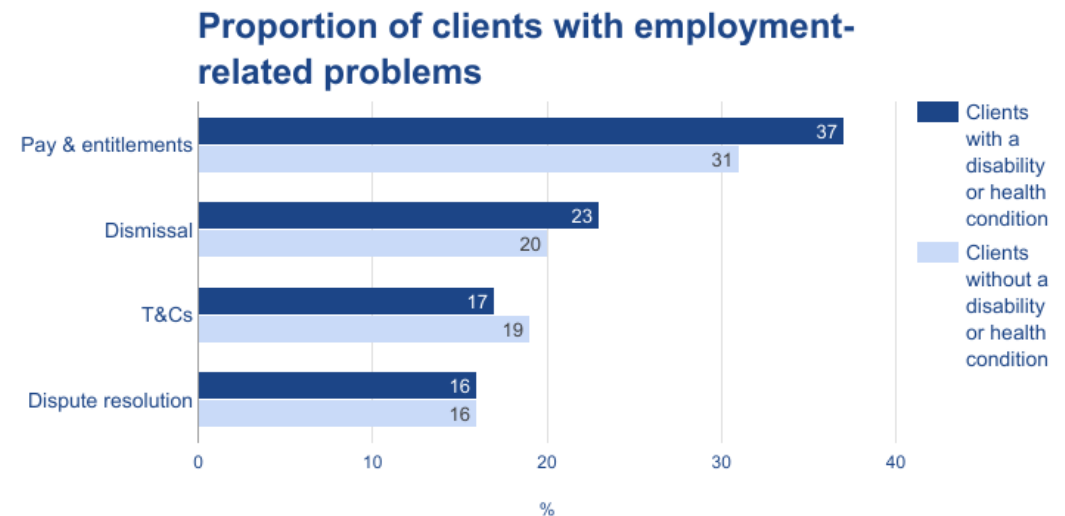
Dealing with uncertain or insufficient income caused by benefit problems and delays can make it much harder for people to concentrate on work or look for a job, especially when they are also managing a health condition.

Making sure people can get benefits reliably and quickly is a crucial first step in addressing the health and disability employment gap.

Employers

Employers also have a critical role to play by making sure they take a responsible attitude to employees. Our data suggests clients who are disabled or have a health condition encounter too much bad practice and discrimination by employers⁴.

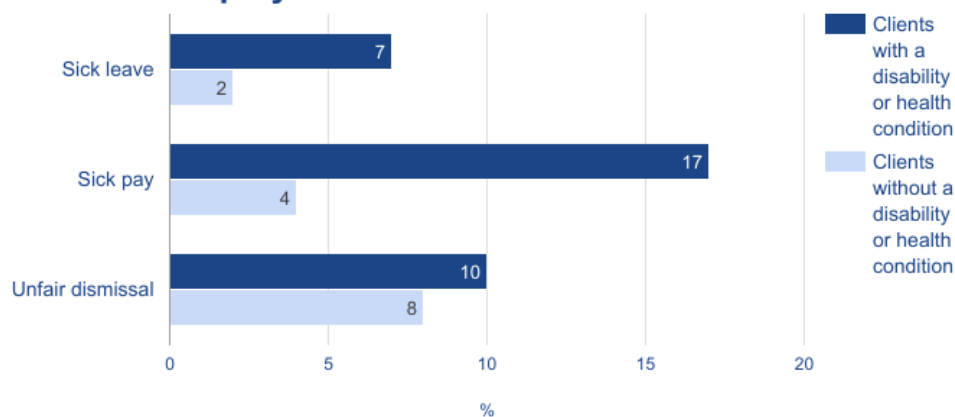
Our data shows that people with a disability or health condition who seek help on an employment-related problem are more likely to require support on an issue relating to pay and entitlements or dismissal than people without a disability or health condition. Issues relating to sick leave, sick pay and unfair dismissal are more common amongst this group⁵.



⁴ The figures quoted in both graphs are based on internal Citizens Advice data in Wales from 2015-16

⁵ Names have been changed in case study examples to protect anonymity

Proportion of clients with certain employment issues



John's story - Torfaen:

John works for a care provider who refused to make reasonable adjustments to enable him to do his job. The company recently introduced an automated log in/out system. As John has a problem with his hearing he cannot understand the automated voice.

After initially being told by his employer that they would investigate and come up with a system that would work for him, he was later told that unless he uses the system he will not be given any calls. He subsequently had his weekly hours reduced from 30 - 39 to an average of 6. This caused him severe financial difficulties.

Previous research by Citizens Advice⁶ also identified significant issues that occur in the employment relationship for disabled people, particularly when employed by a small to medium enterprise (SME). These include:

- pre-employment health questions
- asking for and agreeing adjustments for interviews and working arrangements
- workplace and building accessibility
- lack of awareness of possible adjustments and overestimation of the expense and cost of adjustments
- whether or not to disclose particular conditions, especially invisible or stigmatised conditions
- being off sick.

Many employers, large and small, would benefit from having **more information, guidance and support** on how to better manage employees with health conditions, and design jobs for a more **inclusive workplace**.

⁶ [Solutions for equality and growth](#) Citizens Advice, October 2015

David's story - Flintshire:

David had worked as a plumber for the same employer for over 10 years. Following an extended period of sickness due to mental health problems he returned to work. His medication makes him drowsy and constantly tired. He was subject to disciplinary proceedings after being found asleep in his work van. At the dismissal appeal he asked for reasonable adjustments which would allow him to be picked up and driven to his work appointments, as is the case for some of his colleagues.

This adjustment was denied and he lost his appeal. His confidence has been severely impacted as a result. He is now unemployed and struggling financially. His mental health has also worsened.

Jamie's story - Rhondda Cynon Taf:

Jamie suffered a brain injury in 2014 which could take 4 years to heal. He is under medical supervision from the hospital. He felt able to work full-time and got a job through an agency on a 3 month rolling contract. He informed his employer of his condition and appointment times.

When Jamie was expected to work long shifts up to 12 days straight his medical team noticed that fatigue was hampering his recovery. They wrote to his employers, asking them to restrict his work days to 5 out of 7 days, fully explaining the medical reasons.

The day after his employers received the letter he was dismissed on the spot for not being able to work full shifts due to his illness. He is now seeking employment elsewhere. He doesn't wish to claim ESA and is worried about getting future employment if he declares his condition or if it is found out later.

The evidence from local Citizens Advice across Wales is supported by other UK-wide research which highlights how disabled employees experience all of the problems experienced by the rest of the workforce only more so.

Researchers concluded:

“One of the most important reasons why disabled employees do not remain or progress within employment is that they are subject to a range of negative experiences, many of which can be traced back to their employers, which make their situation particularly fraught. These experiences cover a wide range of employment rights issues and some other forms of ill-treatment.”

What's next?

As part of our work on income security, Citizens Advice is looking at how to improve the financial and practical support from the UK and Welsh Governments to help people with a disability or health condition who can work, to find a job and remain in employment.

Our data shows to achieve the latter new approaches are needed by employers as well as government. Attitudes of employers and wider society also need to change.

Much of this work will be used to inform our response to the UK Government consultation, 'Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper'.

In Wales, Citizens Advice Cymru will be continuing to work in this area over the coming months. This includes using our evidence to help inform the implementation of the Welsh Government's new Employability Policy for Wales, which identifies disabled people as one group needing extra support.

For further information about our work in Wales please contact Lindsey Kearton, Policy Officer Wales
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