



MEDIA RELEASE

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CHANGING EXPERIENCES OF DISABILITY SHAPE MEN'S EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

The effects of disability on everyday functioning can change over time for many Australian men, influencing their employment outcomes and factors associated with staying connected to work, according to new research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

Drawing on data from *Ten to Men – The Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health*, the world's largest longitudinal study on male health, the research examined how changes in disability, or what the study refers to as "functional difficulty", were linked to employment outcomes among Australian men between 2013 and 2025. Functional difficulty refers to challenges affecting everyday functioning, including seeing, hearing, walking, communication, self-care and cognition.

The study found experiences of functional difficulty often changed over time for men, and these varying disability experiences and trajectories were associated with markedly different employment outcomes.

Men whose functional difficulties increased over time experienced the largest decline in workforce participation, with the proportion who were working or actively looking for work falling from 96% to 81% across the study period. Men with persistent functional difficulty were less likely to be connected to the workforce throughout the study.

Dr Sean Martin, Longitudinal Head of *Ten to Men* at AIFS, said the findings challenge the perception that the effect of disability on people's daily lives remains the same over time.

"People's circumstances can improve, worsen or fluctuate over time, and employment supports need to recognise that reality."

"Rather than treating disability as a fixed category, we need to better understand how people's experiences evolve throughout their lives and how this can influence their opportunities to participate in work."

The research also found that the factors associated with employment differed depending on men's experiences of disability over time.

Education emerged as an important pathway into work for some groups, although the level of qualification associated with employment differed across disability groups and by employment outcome. Higher household incomes and living in less disadvantaged areas were also associated with better employment outcomes for some groups.

Life stage also mattered. Older men whose functional difficulties fluctuated or increased were less likely to enter the workforce than younger men in similar circumstances, although self-employment appeared to provide an alternative pathway back into work for some.

The findings suggest improving employment outcomes for people with disability requires a flexible approach that recognises people's different experiences, circumstances and support needs.

Jobs and Skills Australia, Acting Commissioner, Trevor Gauld said, "This report is a timely reminder of the importance of focusing on potential rather than barriers in overcoming inclusion issues. Australia has an economic imperative to increase participation for all Australians, and our focus should be on creating workplaces where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and thrive."

The report recommends looking beyond simple employment rates to better understand how people with disability move into, out of and back into work throughout their lives. The findings suggest employment outcomes are shaped by a combination of factors, including education and training opportunities, financial security, local job markets and life stage, highlighting the need for flexible and tailored support.

"A better understanding of the diverse ways people experience disability can help ensure support is available when and where it is needed most, helping more people remain connected to work or return when circumstances improve," Dr Martin said.

Read the report: [Disability trajectories and employment across the life course among Australian men \(from 2013 to 2025\)](#)

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[Ten to Men](#), is the largest longitudinal study on male health and wellbeing in the world. Funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, the study has been tracking more than 16,000 boys and men since 2013 (with an additional 10,000 men added in 2024-25), asking them about significant issues such as health service usage, mental health, social connection, family safety, fathering supports, and risky health behaviours.

About the report

The report draws on data from 3,763 men who participated in all five waves of Ten to Men between 2013–14 and 2024. It examines self-reported difficulties with everyday activities such as seeing, hearing, walking, communication, self-care and cognition, which may change over time and influence employment outcomes.

Media contact: Simone Redman-Jones (m) 0402 786 097 (e) simone.redman-jones@aifs.gov.au

