# Employment

Seeking and maintaining paid employment can be challenging for people with neuromuscular conditions especially if the condition progresses. Despite these challenges many people in New Zealand with neuromuscular conditions carve out a career and work productively and successfully for a number of years. Research has shown that a paid occupation is achievable for others with the correct supports and environmental conditions (flexibility, adaptations, employer recognition, peer support).

When choosing a career, if possible, choose something that you are passionate about and that meets your physical needs now and into the future as your condition progresses. Consider the workload; repetitive tasks, physicality of the job, or how much speaking is required if you struggle with slurred speech. Ask about opportunities for job shadowing to get a sense of daily tasks and expectations. Consider when are you more alert and more fatigued? Is there flexibility to work from home on certain days or to be flexible with work schedules so you can incorporate rests if needed? Will the job accommodate flexibility to meet these needs so you can be more productive in your role?

Volunteer work is an opportunity to build up skills and experience. It creates the same feelings of self-worth, sense of identity and purpose as a paid job.

Diversity Works New Zealand (formally the EEO Trust) is the national body for workplace diversity and inclusion. They can be contacted on 0800 348 377 or by visiting their website [diversityworksnz.org.nz/](https://diversityworksnz.org.nz/)

If you have a long-term disability or health condition the government can offer a range of support measures to help you get back into the workplace. The following information has been taken from Employment New Zealand website <https://www.employment.govt.nz/> and FIRSTPORT www.firstport.co.nz

# Supported employment agencies

The New Zealand Government funds a range of employment and employment related services and support for people with disability, including training and apprenticeships.

The New Zealand government recognises the value people with a disability can bring to a workforce and the under representation of this community in the labour market. They have set up a number of employment related services and supports for people with a disability, including training and apprenticeships. The list of all government-funded or supported services are available on the website [Employment New Zealand](https://www.employment.govt.nz/workplace-policies/employment-for-disabled-people/resources-and-government-support-for-disabled-employees-and-jobseekers/).

Supported employment agencies are located across New Zealand. They provide support for people with a disability to prepare and look for a job and, if needed, ongoing support once in a job. These agencies are outlined below.

## WorkbridgeWorkbridge is the largest supported employment agency in New Zealand that gives employers access to a wide talent pool of people with a disability, injury, or illness. They can help you develop job searching skills and find the most suitable employment for you. They also administer government funding schemes to support a person with a disability undergoing a period of assessment, work experience, training, or education as part of their plan to gain open employment. <https://workbridge.co.nz/>

New Zealand Disability Support Network (NZDSN)
On the NZDSN website there is a list of supported employment agencies such as Workbridge which you can search for by region or by disability. They can help put you in touch with an agency in your area. [www.nzdsn.org.nz](http://www.nzdsn.org.nz)

Workwise Employment Agency
[Workwise Employment Agency](http://www.workwise.org.nz/) supports people with mental health conditions to return to work and to stay in work. It has several offices in the North Island, and one in Christchurch.[www.workwise.org.nz/](http://www.workwise.org.nz/)

## Be.Employed

Be.Employed is one of the services provided by Be. Accessible. It is a career pathway programme, designed specifically for New Zealand's tertiary qualified access students. Be.Employed facilitates a 12-week paid employment opportunities for undergraduates and graduates looking for meaningful work experience in their areas of study and/or aspiration. Applicants must be living with an access need or disability, have completed study in the last 12months and be in either penultimate or final year of tertiary study. <https://www.belab.co.nz/be-employed>

## Be. Leadership

Be. Leadership is a programme through Be. Accessible that offers participants a unique opportunity to realise and develop leadership potential, self-awareness and the skills and attributes needed to create meaningful change. Be. Leadership takes participants through a year of exploration of different perspectives, self-discovery, and accessibility focused leadership, designed to develop courageous, innovative leaders equipped with the skills to drive accessibility thinking into the future. It is not directly associated with employment but can help people grow and develop skills that may influence their work performance and employability. <https://www.belab.co.nz/be-leadership>

# Benefits while working

The income a person earns from their job can affect their benefit amount. The Work and Income department may grant an exemption for severe disablement. More information about this can be accessed on Employment New Zealand website under “Financial help and wages” or from your local Work and Income office.

## Sustainable employment trial

If you receive the Supported Living Payment and would like to see how you feel going back to work, you can try it out through a sustainable employment trial. You can work 15 hours a week for half a year to test how you feel and you don't lose any of your benefits.

## Employment Transition Grant

This is a weekly payment which helps some people who have completed a sustainable employment trial.

## Work Bonus

Work Bonus is an incentive payment available if you choose to work even though you don't have work obligations as a condition of your benefit.  You may be able to get Work Bonus if you were getting a Supported Living Payment because of poor health, an injury or disability.

Remember, it is illegal for employers to discriminate against people because of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, religious belief, or disability. Equal rights are demanded by the Human Rights Act, 1993, and the Equal Pay Act, 1972. You can seek information about your rights on Health and Disability Commissioner website or Human Right Commission website.

If you would like support to access one of these agencies or funding streams, please contact your local fieldworker or branch.

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