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MEDIA RELEASE

A new research study is being launched today which will investigate the workplace experiences of people who develop a physical disability during the mid-career stage of their working life.

At the mid-career stage of a person's working life, significant amounts of human capital have been accumulated, along with a wealth of experience. Losing these people from the workforce prematurely represents a loss to the individual and their family, a loss of skills and experience from the workforce, and also a loss to the economy.

With an ageing population and more pressure than ever to retain skilled workers in the workforce, there will be a premium on maximising the opportunities for people with disability to remain in the workforce.

The research is being conducted by researchers from the University of Sydney and is being led by a researcher from the Centre for Disability Research and Policy who has first-hand experience of physical disability, and also significant experience in the workplace relations field.

Paul Williamson, suffered a brain aneurysm in his mid-20's requiring urgent brain surgery and his early 30s, required total bilateral knee replacement along with a subsequent ankle replacement due to an aggressive form of arthritis.

“Stereotypes about the implications of disability on workplace productivity, concerns on the part of employers about the cost of workplace accommodations, conscious and unconscious bias on the part of both employers and colleagues – together, can marginalise the attachment of people with disability from the workforce”.

“Gaining a better understanding the experiences of these people, who are already facing considerable challenges in their lives, gives us the opportunity to highlight possible ways to ensure more people with disability are able to maintain their connection to the workforce.”

Data shows there is considerable scope for improvement in the employment of people with disability in Australia, with rates here well behind other OECD countries. Too many experienced and capable people seem to be leaving the workforce prematurely when they develop a physical disability.

“In my experience, the workplace is not always a friendly place for people with disability – a lot comes down to the attitudes of individual supervisors. With the right support and workplace accommodations, these people could continue working for much longer – a real win/win situation for everyone.”

To take part in the study, go to: www.sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/.

Paul is based in Canberra and can be contacted on 0402 974 010.

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