

Education, employment and epilepsy



Living with epilepsy and a cognitive disability does not mean education, training or employment pathways are out of the question.

It is up to the individual to decide whether they feel able to study or work. But some reasonable adjustments may need to be made in education or workplace settings to assist the person fulfil their potential.

Education and employment

When planning for the transition to education, training or employment, it is important to focus on the person's goals and aspirations. There are a wide range of options available, including further education and training, apprenticeships, traineeships and employment.

To assist in planning the person may want to consider work experience, work placements, volunteering and visits to further education and training institutions.

Some people living with epilepsy and a cognitive disability may require additional assistance when studying at University, TAFE, private training organisations or entering into employment. Assistance may be required in the areas of planning, education arrangements, accessibility, assistive technology or other supports.

What does this mean for the person?

Further education and training

Progressing from secondary schooling to further education (TAFE, vocational training and University) is a significant transition period for young people and families. However, this transition does not only apply to young people, as people of any age may pursue further education in order to advance existing skills, learn new skills or change career.



Starting further education and training may involve adjusting to a new environment, new learning styles, new forms of assessment, and being surrounded by a wide range of different people. This transition can be particularly daunting for some people who live with epilepsy and a cognitive disability. Consequently, some people may require adjustments to accommodate their specific learning needs.

All institutes of technology, polytechnics and Universities have dedicated disability and accessibility services to assist students with a disability studying in their institution. These staff can assist with the provision of academic support workers (note takers, readers), access to adaptive technology (voice activated software), alternative arrangements for assessment (additional time, scribes), alternative course materials, enrolment and campus orientation, liaison with lecturers and teachers, physical access to facilities, and referral to other support services (counselling, health, housing, finance).

The *Education and Training Act 2020* clarifies the obligations and provides students with a disability the right to education and training opportunities on the same basis as students without a disability.

<https://www.education.govt.nz/school/student-support/special-education/education-disability-legislation/>

Employment

Some people may be considering or seeking employment. Employment types may include apprenticeships, traineeships, open employment or supported employment.

Apprenticeships and traineeships are a way of combining training and employment and can lead to a nationally recognised qualification. Apprenticeships and traineeships can be undertaken by anyone of working age and are available to school-leavers, as well as those re-entering the workforce or wanting a career change.

Open employment refers to working in the open labour market. Depending on the job requirements an applicant may need to have a particular qualification (such as secondary school completion). Some people living with epilepsy and a cognitive disability, particularly those with uncontrolled seizure activity, may be prohibited from working in certain jobs as the risk to the individual, colleagues and/or the community may be too high should a seizure occur.

Epilepsy disclosure

Every person with epilepsy must determine whether they are required to or want to disclose their epilepsy diagnosis to their employer and/or co-workers.

To learn more about whether disclosure about epilepsy is required, how to go about it, and the discrimination laws that protect someone who does disclose please contact Epilepsy New Zealand for further information and support.

Employment support

Some people living with epilepsy and a cognitive disability may want assistance finding and sustaining employment.

A number of Government programs provide specialist support to individuals and their employers.

What can you do to help?

- Speak to the person about their goals and aspirations to identify areas of interest and what type of study or employment might suit them.
- Visit education and training institutions and arrange to meet with course coordinators and disability support staff.
- Speak to disability career development professionals who can assist with employment planning, volunteering and work experience, and job applications.
- Have an open discussion about workplace epilepsy diagnosis disclosure, taking into account the type of employment and nature of the person's seizure activity.

Where to go for further information:

Epilepsy New Zealand <http://epilepsy.org.nz/>



National Support Centre

Epilepsy House, 6 Vialou Street, Hamilton
Central, Hamilton 3204
PO Box 1074, Hamilton 3240
Phone: 07 834 3556
Email: national@epilepsy.org.nz

This information sheet is part of a suite of resources that are targeted to family members, carers and support workers, to assist with caring for people living with epilepsy and a cognitive disability.

The information contained in this publication provides general information about epilepsy. It does not provide specific advice. Specific health and medical advice should always be obtained from an appropriately qualified health professional.