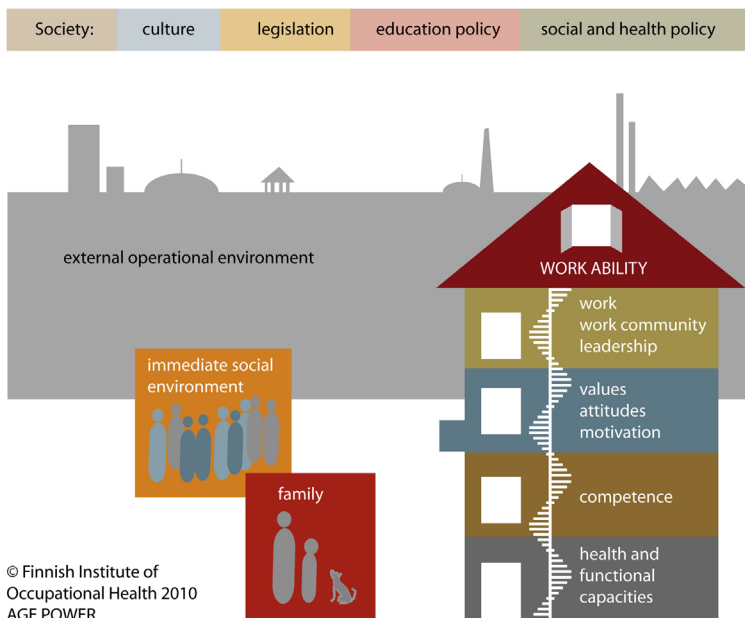


## Work ability in Australia – pilot study

### The Issue

Population ageing is expected to place a significant economic burden on Australia's social security system, particularly Medicare and the age pension. In response governments are developing policies to promote increased labour force participation by older Australians (45+).



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**Figure 1: Holistic model of work ability**

The concept of work ability, or workers' capacity to meet the demands of their jobs, was developed by Finnish researchers. As Figure 1 suggests work ability includes the way the work environment supports the person in carrying out work (organisational capacity) and the way that the person's health and work attitudes influence and are influenced by their work (personal capacity).

A scan of Northern European literature has shown that work ability is an important component of sustained employability. However, work ability has not been a focus in Australia. Finnish and European researchers have focussed only on the health and functional capacity of the individual worker. This pilot study included the organisational capacity aspect of work ability.

### The Study

The current work is based on a national survey of 3203 randomly selected Australian workers aged 18 to 83. Work ability was assessed through examination of individual's personal capacity and their organisational capacity.

### Main Findings

Workers with work related health issues particularly mental stress at work tended to report low work ability.

Satisfied workers and those who intended to remain in their current role reported higher work ability than workers who were not satisfied with their jobs. Overall work ability did not differ with age.

While blue-collar workers reported poorer work ability compared to other occupational groups the relationships were not strong enough to warrant targeting interventions at this sector.

Mental demands were a stronger correlate of intention to remain in one's job for blue-collar compared to white-collar workers.

Participants working in large organisations reported lower organisational capacity, particularly younger workers and those with low overall work ability.

### Key Messages

Findings supported the future consideration of work ability interventions. If work is designed and managed to eliminate or minimise hazards and risk work ability will be improved. Improving work ability can extend workers' working lives.

Potential interventions to examine the impact of work design on work ability will be considered by Safe Work Australia's Research and Evaluation Reference Group.

An executive summary and the full report which this brief is drawn from can be found at [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/about/publications/pages/work-ability-in-Australia-pilot-study](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/about/publications/pages/work-ability-in-Australia-pilot-study).