DIVERSITY, PARTICIPATION AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

LAURIE BROWN
About NATSEM at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) was established on 1 January 1993, and supports its activities through research grants, commissioned research and longer term contracts for policy model development and maintenance. In January 2014, the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra (IGPA) was established to harness the research strengths of NATSEM and the ANZSOG Institute for Governance (ANZSIG). IGPA is one of Australia’s leading economic and social policy research institutes, with NATSEM being regarded as one of the world’s foremost centres of excellence for micro-data analysis, microsimulation modelling and policy evaluation.

The aim of IGPA is to create and sustain an international class research institution for the study and practice of governance and public policy encompassing the key research themes of:

• social well-being and equity
• informed communities
• democracy, citizenship and participation
• policy modelling and evaluation
• public sector design and innovation

The Institute has a strong social mission committed to the production of leading edge research and research driven education programs with genuine public value and, by implication, policy impact. The integration of ANZSIG and NATSEM creates exciting opportunities for the development of cutting edge research in public policy analysis through combining expertise in qualitative and quantitative methods, policy modelling and evaluation. Policy changes often have to be made without sufficient information about either the current environment or the consequences of change. IGPA aims to be a key contributor to social and economic policy debate and analysis by undertaking independent and impartial research of the highest quality, including supplying valued consultancy services. In keeping with IGPA’s core mission, many of NATSEM’s research projects have had significant policy impact and led to changes in policy.

Director: Professor Mark Evans
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About the Author

Professor Laurie Brown is Deputy Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis at the University of Canberra, having previously headed NATSEM’s Health, Disability and Ageing research team. She is one of Australasia’s leading health geographers and modellers, having over 25 years’ experience in health policy and practice and researching the impacts of demographic, social and economic change. She has been a consultant to the New Zealand and Australian Governments and various State and Territory Governments. Professor Brown is currently playing a leading role in the development and application of dynamic and spatial (micro-) simulation models and the use of micro-data for investigating policy issues in the fields of health, disability, ageing and caring in Australia and internationally. Her work is recognised for its emphasis on the social determinants of health framework and the ‘Health in All Policies’ approach. Professor Brown has won a number of awards for her research including the University of Canberra Vice Chancellor’s Award for Research Excellence in the Social Sciences, 2013.

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is now operating across Australia, with an estimated 410,000 individuals expected to receive support services through the scheme. The NDIS is described as a new way of providing individualised support for eligible people with permanent and significant disability, their families and carers. The rationale underpinning the NDIS is that a flexible, whole-of-life approach to support will better enable persons with permanent and significant disability to pursue their goals and aspirations and participate in daily life. The right to full and effective participation and inclusion in society is one of the fundamental general principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Using data from the 2012 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), this Report examines the diversity and participation of Australians with disability of working age i.e. those in the 15-64 year age group. The Report highlights issues related to home and family; education and training; socio-economic well-being; participation in paid work; participation in social, community and civic activities; and transport.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall, one in seven Australians of working age has a disability with over 555,000 individuals aged 15-64 years having profound or severe limitations in core activities of daily living. People with profound and severe disability tend to have multiple impairments, and assistance is needed or difficulty is experienced in multiple areas of activity. Mental illness, restriction in physical activities, intellectual disability and chronic and/or recurring pain are the four most prevalent types of disability associated with profound or severe limitations in core activities.

HOME AND FAMILY

Breakdown of personal relationships is common among people with disability of working age. While couple families with children remains the most common family type, much higher proportions of people with disability aged 15-64 years live in one parent families or live alone relative to people without disability. Rates of home ownership are low for people with profound disability who tend to live in a wide variety of accommodation types under differing tenure conditions. Homelessness is common especially for people with severe disability.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Persons with disability, especially males, leave school ‘early’. The proportion of people with profound or severe disability aged 15-64 years who did not complete high school was twice that for people without disability. Vocational educational certificates are by far the most common non-school qualification for men with disability. Significantly lower proportions of people with disability have university qualifications and are under-represented in key areas of tertiary education such as management and commerce, and education. Provision of support and special arrangements by schools and educational institutions enable many persons with disability to undertake study.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

Four of every five persons with profound disability and three of five persons with severe disability rely on Government pensions and allowances as their main source of income. The Disability Support Pension dominates the income support system for persons with disability of working age. People with disability who have limitations in core activities of daily living experience significant income inequality when compared with persons with no disability. Higher proportions of people with disability live in socio-economically disadvantaged areas when compared with persons with no disability.

PARTICIPATION IN PAID WORK

Participation in paid work is very low for people with profound or severe disability. Men and women with disability are most often employed as unskilled or lowly skilled labourers. For those people with disability who are working part-time, many are ‘under-employed’ and would like a job with more hours. Persons with disability encounter many barriers to finding work. Access to a variety of arrangements with employers -such as training, assistance at work from a support person or colleague, provision of special equipment or modified buildings and fittings - would enable better participation in the workforce.

PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ACTIVITIES

Marked inverse gradients exist in the rates of participation by people with disability in the 15-64 year age group in sporting activities, attending or visiting cultural venues and events, or being actively
involved in community support groups or civic organisations. In a three month period, one in five individuals with a profound disability and one in ten with a severe disability will not participate in any social or community activities away from their home. However, many people with disability undertake voluntary work in the community.

TRANSPORT
A large proportion of individuals with disability have difficulty travelling because of their disability. Having a driver’s licence does not ensure mobility and independence. One in ten persons aged 15-64 years with profound or severe disability requires assistance when travelling in private motor vehicles. Two of every five persons of working age and who have a profound disability cannot use any form of public transport.

CONCLUSIONS
Australia’s reform of the disability sector in recent years has focussed on the introduction of the NDIS. Whether the scheme can be successfully implemented and the desired outcomes achieved remain to be seen. As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Australia does have an obligation to develop and implement policies to ensure the full and effective participation and inclusion in society of its people with disability.

This Report has shown that the majority of people of working age with profound or severe disability are limited in their social and economic inclusion. This includes difficulties with family relationships; inability to live independently; low rates of employment and income inequality; low rates of participation in cultural, recreational and sporting life; a lack of involvement in political and public life; and poor access to appropriate transportation.

This Report provides a poor scorecard for the social and economic participation of Australians with disability of working age. In reforming Australia’s disability policy, it is time to confront reality and examine critical governance issues that either hinder or promote the social and economic inclusion of people with disability.

3. ibid
In this contextual setting, this Report examines the diversity and participation of Australians with disability of working age i.e. those in the 15-64 year age group. The Report highlights issues related to home and family; education and training; socio-economic well-being; participation in paid work; participation in social, community and civic activities; and transport.

The data presented are drawn from the 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) national Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) (ABS, 2013). The data have been extracted using Tablebuilder which is an online tool for creating tables and graphs from ABS microdata. Explanations and descriptions of the data and variables used are provided in the technical notes at the end of the Report.

In 2012, there were over 2.2 million Australians in the 15-64 year age group with disability, the vast majority of whom had limitations in core activities of daily living or restrictions in schooling or employment (Figure 1). Ultimately, around 410,000 persons with disability are expected to be enrolled in the NDIS (Productivity Commission, 2011). The group of people with disability who are most likely to meet eligibility criteria are those with profound or severe limitations in core activities of daily living. Prevalence data from the 2012 SDAC suggests that there are more than 248,000 males and 308,000 females living in Australia with a profound or severe disability.

Disability covers a large range of impairments (Table 1). The four most prevalent types of disability associated with profound and severe limitations are: mental illness; restriction in physical activities including

![Figure 1 Prevalence of disability in Australia's working age population (15-64 years) (Male, Female). Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers](#)
One in seven Australians of working age has a disability.

There are over 555,000 individuals with profound or severe limitations in core activities of daily living aged 15-64 years.

People with profound and severe disability are likely to have multiple impairments, and have multiple areas of activity where assistance is needed or difficulty is experienced.

Table 1 Disability status by disability type for persons aged 15-64 years (000’s).

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<th>Loss of hearing</th>
<th>Blackouts, seizures, unconsciousness</th>
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Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

Note: M = Male, F = Female; " mental illness includes nervous or emotional conditions
3. Home and Family

Figure 2 combines the registered and social marital status of Australia’s working age population to identify possible differences in the personal relationships of people with and without disability. Those with profound disability are most likely to have never married, with nearly 60% of males with a profound disability being single and over 40% of females. Also very few individuals with profound disability live in de facto marriages.

Significantly, the rate of separation or divorce among people with disability – both for males and females - is twice that of the population without disability. Separation and divorced is particularly common among women with disability. For example, over 27% of women with severe disability are separated or divorced.

In terms of family and household characteristics, over half of individuals with no disability are members of couple families with children (Figure 3). While this family type remains the most frequent household type among persons with disability of working age, it is not as prevalent especially for women with disability. Given the relatively high separation/divorce rate among people with disability, it is perhaps not surprising that many more of these individuals are members of one parent families. However, with the exception of people with profound disability, the rate of living alone is also high relative to rates for people without disability.

The patterns of housing tenure for persons aged 15-64 years differed little between men and women and therefore have been combined in Figure 4. Home ownership – with or without a mortgage – is particularly low for people with a profound disability at 33% compared with 58%.

Table 2 Broad area of activity where assistance is required or difficulty is experienced by persons with disability aged 15-64 years (000’s).

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<th>Profound limitation</th>
<th>Severe limitation</th>
<th>Moderate/ mild limitation</th>
<th>Schooling / employ. restriction</th>
<th>No limitation/ restriction</th>
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<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
Note: M = Male; F = Female
of people without disability. Nearly 16% of people with profound disability live rent-free and another 12% live under other tenure arrangements.

Around 1 in 15 males (7%) and 1 in 12 females (8%) with a profound limitation in core activities live in ‘special’ dwellings and about 1% of those with a severe, moderate or mild disability. This is typically some form of accommodation for the retired or aged either in the community or in the form of a non-private dwelling e.g. a residential aged care facility. In contrast, only 3-4 persons per 1,000 persons without disability live in special dwellings and these are more likely to be religious and educational institutions, staff quarters, guest or boarding houses, or hotel, motels or other forms of short term accommodation.

Data from Australia’s 2011 census indicated that one individual in every 180 Australians aged 15-64 years was homeless as defined by the ABS (see Technical notes for definition). Many of these individuals were persons with a disability. For example, on census night in 2011, males of working age and who needed assistance with core activities of daily living were over-represented 5 fold in hostels for the homeless, night shelters or refuges, and females 3.5 fold. As Figure 5 shows it is the group of individuals with severe disability who have the highest proportion of individuals experiencing homelessness. As many as one in four persons with severe disability had experienced, at some point in their life, being without a permanent place to live and one in five had experienced being homelessness. The most common reasons for persons with disabilities being without a permanent place to live include:
• problems with personal relationships;
• financial difficulties including losing their job;
• having just moved into/back into a town or city;
• tight housing/rental markets; and
• mental illness or other health issues including drug and alcohol abuse along with violence, abuse and/or neglect.

Figure 4 Housing tenure of Australia’s working age population by disability status.

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

Figure 5 Proportion of persons with disability, aged 15-64 years, having experienced homelessness or being without a permanent place to live.

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

4. Education and Training

In 2012, one in ten persons of working age with a profound disability did not attend school and one in fifty with a severe disability (Table 3). Persons with disability leave school ‘early’, especially males. While one in three persons aged 15-64 years with no disability left school at 16 years of age or younger, three of every five individuals who had some limitation in core activities – whether this was profound, severe, moderate or mild - left school at 16 years of age or younger. Even every second male with a disability but no limitation in core activities left school early (16 years of age or younger). Females with disability but no limitation in core activities tended to leave school at similar ages to females without disability.

In terms of completing high school, one in four 15-64 year olds with no disability left school without completing Year 12 or obtaining some vocational educational qualification. In contrast, for both men and women with profound disability and men with severe disability, one in two individuals left school without getting a formal educational qualification.
The highest level of educational qualification attained by Australians of working age by disability status is shown in Figure 6. Irrespective of disability status, females are more likely to have either advanced diploma/diploma or university based qualifications than males. Vocational educational certificates are the most common highest educational qualification for males of working age. This is especially so for males with disability. Persons of working age with disability and limitations in core activities are significantly under-represented in those with tertiary qualifications (bachelor degrees, graduate diplomas/graduate certificates or postgraduate degrees). For example, for males with moderate/mild limitation in core activities or males not limited in core activities but who had restrictions in schooling or employment to achieve parity in tertiary education with persons without disability then twice the number of these males would have had to complete university degrees or graduate diplomas/certificates. While the numbers are less for females with a similar disability status they are nevertheless under-represented by some 60%.

The most common fields of highest non-school qualifications for males of working age with no disability are, in order: engineering and related technologies; management and commerce; architecture and building; and society and culture. While these same fields feature for males with disability, those with limitations in core activities are significantly under-represented (by 30% or more) in the key field of management and commerce and over-represented (by 30% or more) in society and culture. For other fields, males with limitations in core activities are under-represented in the areas of natural and physical sciences, IT and education, and over-represented in the creative arts and food, hospitality and personal services.

For females with no disability, the most common areas of highest non-school qualifications are: management and commerce; society and culture, health and education. These are also the most popular fields for females with disability. However females with limitations in core activities are under-represented by some 30% in having qualifications in education.

In 2012, in the younger segment of the working age group (20 to 44 years), 9% of males without disability were in part-time study and another 9% in full-time study, and 10% respectively of females. However, in general, persons with a disability were 2-3 times less likely to be in full-time study (the exception being females who had a disability but who were not limited in core activities or restricted in schooling or employment). For part-time study the picture is less clear – around 11% of males aged 20-44 years who had a disability but who were not limited in core activities or restricted in schooling or employment were undertaking part-time study but only 2% of those with a profound disability and 7% in other disability status groups. For females, relatively more (12%) individuals with moderate/mild disability or who were not limited in core activities but were restricted in schooling or employment were studying part-time. However, only 6-7% of those with profound or severe disability were undertaking part-time study. The rate of part- and full-time study for the older working age group (i.e. those aged 45-64 years) does not vary significantly by disability status with around 3% of males and 5% of females currently studying.

For those persons with disability of working age still studying, the most common types of support or special arrangements provided at the school or educational institution included:

- special tuition;
- a counsellor or disability support person;
- special assessment procedures; and
- special equipment (including computers).

### Table 3 Level of educational attainment for Australians of working age by disability status (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did not attend school</th>
<th>Year 11 or below</th>
<th>Year 12 or non-school qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound limitation</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>52.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe limitation</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate/mild limit.</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/employ. res.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No limitation/restriction</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No disability</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
5. Socio-Economic Well-being

Data are collected in the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers on sources and levels of personal income for persons aged 15 years or more living in households (see Technical notes).

As shown in Table 4, the main source of personal (as opposed to household) income differs greatly by disability status. Earnings from wages and salary is the predominant source of income of persons without disability as well as those who have a disability but with no limitations or restrictions. In stark contrast, Government pensions and allowances are the main source of income for over 80% of persons with profound disability and 60% with severe disability.

For those individuals receiving income support from the Government, the two most common pensions or allowances for males of working age without disability are the Newstart Allowance (42%) and Youth Allowance (32%). For females with no disability, income support is spread across Newstart Allowance (26%), Youth Allowance (23%), Carer Allowance (24%) and Carer Payment (20%). However, the Disability Support Pension overshadows other Government pensions and allowances for persons with disability of working age (excluding those with no limitations or restrictions). The DSP is the main pension for over 90% of individuals with profound disability; 85% of males and 72% of females with severe disability; 71% of males and 53% of females with moderate or mild limitations in core activities.

The distribution of total weekly income people received in 2012 is examined by disability status in Figure 7. Income quintiles for the population aged 15 years or more have been used as the measure of income. The results are then presented in the format of cumulative distributions. If there is an even distribution of income then 20% of each group will fall into each quintile. The cumulative distribution as depicted in Figure 7 would be a straight line starting at 20% in the lowest income quintile, increasing 20% across each quintile and reaching 100% at the highest quintile.

The distributions (lines) for females with no disability and for females with disability but no limitations or restrictions are very similar and most closely approximate an ‘even’ distribution. Males in these two disability groups closely follow. However, the marked divergence

- Persons with disability, especially males, are ‘early’ school leavers.
- The proportion of people with profound or severe disability aged 15-64 years who did not complete high school was twice that for people without disability.
- Vocational educational certificates are by far the most common non-school qualification for men with disability.
- Significantly lower proportions of people with disability have university qualifications and are under-represented in key areas of tertiary education such as management and commerce, and education.
- Provision of support and special arrangements enable many persons with disability to undertake study.

![Figure 6 Highest educational qualification attained by Australians of working age by disability status.](image-url)
from these lines for the other disability groups in Figure 7 shows that there is significant inequality in income for the other disability groups. For example, 76% of males with profound disability are in the lowest (poorest) two income quintiles and 95% are in the lowest three. The pattern for females with profound disability is very similar - although there are slightly more females in the third income quintile and slightly fewer in the second quintile.

The ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD) provides a summary measure of the overall economic well-being of Australia’s working age population. This is based on the characteristics of the populations aged 15 years or more living in the areas in which people reside. Using quintiles again, Figure 8 shows that the trend observed for persons without disability and persons with disability but no limitations or restrictions is one of increasing socio-economic advantage – the number of these individuals living in an area...
6. Participation in Paid Work

Table 5 provides a breakdown of labour force status by disability status for Australia’s working age population. Participation in paid work is very low for people with profound or severe disability with 80% and 65% of individuals not in the labour force respectively. For every male with a profound disability who is employed full-time there are 10 who are not in the labour force, and for women there are as many as 40.

For the individuals of working age who were living in households and employed at the time of the 2012 SDAC survey, the three most common occupational groups for males without disability were technicians and tradesmen (23%), professionals (20%) and managers (16%). For women without disability, the most common occupations were professionals (26%), clerical and administrative workers (24%), community and personal service workers and sales workers both at 14%.

However, males and females with disability who were in paid work were both most often employed as ‘labourers’. This occupational group includes, for example, cleaners and laundry workers, factory process workers, packers and product assemblers, food preparation assistants, garden workers, freight handlers, shelf fillers and other types of labourers (e.g. construction and mining labourers, farm and forestry workers). Those with profound disability were 6-7 times over-represented in this occupational group, those with severe disability 2-fold and the other disability groups by approximately 50%. Men with disability were much less likely to be employed as managers or technicians and tradesmen while women with disability were significantly under-represented as sales workers.

A large number of persons with disability who are working part-time are ‘under-employed’ in that they would like a job with more hours. The group of people with disability who stand-out with respect to wanting to work more hours are those who are not limited in core activities but who are restricted in schooling or employment. Nearly 50% of males and over 30% of females would like a job with more hours.

As a benchmark, about a third of men without disability and who are employed and usually work 34 hours or less per week would like to work more hours and about one in five women.

Figure 8  Distribution of persons of working age by Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage quintile and disability status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Status</th>
<th>Males and Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>profound</td>
<td>severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mod/mild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sch/emp/uns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no res.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>no disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers

- Four of every five persons with profound disability and three of five persons with severe disability rely on Government pensions and allowances as their main source of income.
- The Disability Support Pension dominates the income support system for persons with disability of working age.
- People with disability who have limitations in core activities of daily living experience significant income inequality.
- People with disability who have limitations in core activities of daily living are over-represented in socio-economically disadvantaged areas.
Participation in paid work is very low for people with profound or severe disability. Men and women with disability are most often employed as unskilled or lowly skilled labourers. For those people with disability who are working part-time, many are ‘under-employed’ and would like a job with more hours. Persons with disability encounter many barriers to finding work. Access to a variety of arrangements with employers would enable better participation in the workforce.

### Table 5 Labour force status of the working age population by disability status (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not in the labour force</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Employed part-time</th>
<th>Employed full-time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound limitation</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe limitation</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate/mild limitation</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/employment res.</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No limitation/restriction</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No disability</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
Note: M = Male, F = Female

The main reasons that all individuals of working age – of those who were either unemployed or not in the labour force and who had looked for work in the previous month - experienced difficulty in finding work included:

- too many applicants for available jobs;
- no vacancies at all;
- insufficient work experience;
- lacked necessary skills or education; and
- in addition for females, unsuitable hours.

While persons of working age with disability also experienced these problems, their own ill health or disability was identified as the major reason for their difficulty in finding paid work.

The main requirements/employer arrangements that persons with disability thought would enable them to better participate in the workforce include:

- training (and retraining);
- assistance with work from a special support person or help from someone at work;
- appropriate equipment; and
- modified buildings/fittings.

• Participation in paid work is very low for people with profound or severe disability.
• Men and women with disability are most often employed as unskilled or lowly skilled labourers.
• For those people with disability who are working part-time, many are ‘under-employed’ and would like a job with more hours.
• Persons with disability encounter many barriers to finding work.
• Access to a variety of arrangements with employers would enable better participation in the workforce.
7. Participation in Social, Community and Civic Activities

Many individuals with disability feel socially isolated and excluded from the popular social, community and civic activities that the rest of the population enjoy. For example, as Figure 9 shows, there is a steep ‘disability gradient’ for both men and women in the 15-64 year age group in their involvement in sporting activities – whether this is in terms of actively participating in sport, attending sporting events as a spectator or participating in physical activities for the purposes of exercise or recreation. Less than one in ten persons with a profound disability and only 12-15% of those with a severe disability are actively involved in sports, and only 30-40% undertake physical activity for exercise or recreation.

While women with disability are noticeably less likely to be sports participants or spectators than men with disability, they do, however, undertake physical activity for exercise or recreation at similar rates of participation.

A disability gradient is also present in terms of attending or visiting cultural venues and events (Table 6). While two out of three school or employment restriction attended a movie, a concert, the theatre or a performing arts event in the past 12 months, only one out of three men and two out of five women with a profound disability did. While this disparity may not be as marked for the other venues/events listed in Table 6, a disability gradient still exists. Unlike sports, but perhaps in keeping with the general population, it is the men with disability who participate at lower rates in cultural activities and events than women.

Figure 9 Proportion of persons with disability of working age participating in sports activities in last year.

![Figure 9](image)

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
Note: M = Male, F = Female

Table 6 Proportion of persons with disability of working age who visited a cultural venue or event in last year (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Status</th>
<th>Movie, concert, theatre, performing arts event</th>
<th>Public library</th>
<th>Museum or art gallery</th>
<th>Botanic garden, zoo or aquarium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profound limitation</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe limitation</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate/mild limitation</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/employment res.</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No limitation/restriction</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
Note: M = Male, F = Female
Also relatively fewer males with disability went out to a restaurant or club over three months compared with females. For example, around 48% of males with a profound or severe disability go to a restaurant or club in a three month period compared with 55% of females. These proportions rise to nearly 80% of males who have a disability but with no limitations or restrictions and almost 90% of females.

Overall, nearly one in five individuals with a profound disability and one in ten with a severe disability did not participate in any social or community activities away from their home in the last three months.

Participation in community organisations and support groups ranges from a low of 23% of males with profound disability to a high of only 55% for females who have a disability but no limitation or restriction (Figure 10). The two most common organisations are those providing education and training or parenting/children/youth groups. Around 10% of persons with disability of working age are actively involved in each of these types of organisations. A further 5% of males are involved in service clubs and 10% of females with either welfare or health promotion and support organisations. Around 10 and 15% of men with disability aged 15-64 years are involved in church activities and 15-20% of women with disability. Again, Figure 10 shows that rates of participation increase as the severity of disability and impairment diminishes.

Australians also are well known for their high rate of volunteering in the community. Many people with disability who are not attached to the paid workforce or only through part-time work are involved in volunteering. The 2012 SDAC showed that one in ten individuals aged 15-64 years and who had a profound or severe disability had undertaken voluntary work in the last three months. This participation rate doubled to one in five of those with a disability but who did not have any core activity limitation or restriction in schooling or employment.

Relatively few persons with disability are involved in civic or political-governance type organisations (Figure 10). The top three organisations in terms of participation rates for both men and women with disability are:

- trade unions or professional/technical associations (5-10% of individuals);
- environmental or animal welfare groups (approximately 5%); and
- body corporate or tenants’ associations (around 3%).

A further 3% of women with disability are involved in human and civil rights group.

• Marked inverse gradients exist in the rates of participation by people with disability in the 15-64 year age group in sporting activities, attending or visiting cultural venues and events, or being actively involved in community support groups or civic organisations.
• Many people with disability undertake voluntary work in the community.
• In a three month period, one in five individuals with a profound disability and one in ten with a severe disability will not participate in any social or community activities away from their home.

Figure 10 Proportion of persons with disability of working age actively involved in community or civic/governance organisations in last 12 months
The difficulties that people with disability encounter in travelling are further exacerbated by the fact that public transport is not available in the area in which many live. Around 13% of people with disability but who are not limited in core activities report having no public transport in their area. This rises to 18% for men with disability and who do have limitations in core activities and 15% for women.

- A large proportion of individuals have difficulty travelling because of their disability.
- Having a driver’s licence does not ensure mobility and independence.
- One in ten persons aged 15-64 years with profound or severe disability requires assistance when travelling in private motor vehicles.
- Two of every five persons with a profound disability of working age cannot use any form of public transport.

A person’s ability to drive or use public transport is a key issue affecting his or her ability to get to work or participate in social and civic activities. Australians of working age also are notorious for their reliance on the private motor vehicle and low use of public transport.

Around 90% of people aged 15-64 years with mild or moderate disability and those with no limitations in core activities (with or without schooling or employment restrictions) are licensed to drive, about 80% of those with severe disability, and just over half of persons with profound disability.

However, many individuals with profound or severe disability - even though they have a driver’s licence - do not drive at all or infrequently. In fact, only 25% of individuals with profound disability and 60% of those with severe disability drive at least once a week. One in four persons with profound or severe disability report that they often need to be driven. In addition, while many people with disability do not need to be driven, they have difficulty travelling without assistance. Around 10% of persons with a profound or severe disability need assistance when travelling privately.

With respect to the use of public transport, two of every five persons with a profound disability of working age cannot use any form of public transport. An additional 20% of individuals can use some but not all forms (Figure 11). For those with a severe disability, 15% are unable to use any form of public transport and 10% only some forms.

Figure 11 Proportion of people with disability aged 15-64 years who are able to use public transport

Source: ABS 2012 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
9. Conclusions

Australia’s reform of the disability sector in recent years has focussed on the introduction of the NDIS. Whether the scheme can be successfully implemented and the desired outcomes achieved remain to be seen. However, Australia as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has an obligation and is bound to develop and carry out policies to ensure the full and effective participation and inclusion in society of its people with disability.

This Report has shown that the majority of people of working age with profound or severe disability are limited in their social and economic inclusion. This includes difficulties with personal and family relationships; inability to live independently; low rates of employment and income inequality; low rates of participation in cultural, recreational and sporting life; a lack of involvement in political and public life; and poor access to appropriate transportation.

Reform of Australia’s income support system is being embarked upon by the current Coalition Government. The disability support pension is firmly in the spotlight as the Government turns its attention to getting greater participation in paid work by people with disability. The UN Convention requires countries to ensure equal access to education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning. Persons with disability in Australia are leaving school early and are not attaining the same educational qualifications as those without disability. Education not only facilitates greater economic participation and independence but also fosters an increased sense of dignity and self-worth.

Persons with disability should have equal rights to work and gain a living. At present, around 80% of persons of working age with profound disability are not in the workforce and 65% of those with severe limitations in core activities of daily living.

This Report provides a poor scorecard for the social and economic participation of Australians with disability of working age. In reforming Australia’s disability policy, it is time to confront reality and examine critical governance issues that either hinder or promote the social and economic inclusion of people with disability.
References


Technical notes

The data used in this Report were taken from the 2012 Australian Bureau of Statistics’ national Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) using Tablebuilder. SDAC was conducted between 5 August 2012 and 2 March 2013.

Disability
The variable used to define the different population groups that have been compared in the Report is disability status. Disability status has 8 categories -

0. Not applicable
1. Has disability and profoundly limited in core activities
2. Has disability and severely limited in core activities
3. Has disability and moderately limited in core activities
4. Has disability and mildly limited in core activities
5. Has disability and not limited in core activities but restricted in schooling or employment
6. Has disability and not limited in core activities, or restricted in schooling or employment
7. Has a long-term health condition without disability
8. No long-term health condition or disability

Categories 3 and 4 – moderately and mildly limited in core activities – were combined and category 7 was excluded from the analyses. People without disability were the comparator (control) group against which the experiences and characteristics of people with disability were compared. For many of the social, community and civic participation and transport variables data was not available in Tablebuilder on the population with no disability. People with disability but without any limitations or schooling or employment restrictions became the main comparator group.

Disability type(s), which can have multiple responses, identifies 16 broad disability impairments.

01. Loss of sight
02. Loss of hearing
03. Speech difficulties
04. Breathing difficulties
05. Chronic or recurring pain or discomfort
06. Blackouts, seizures or loss of consciousness
07. Slow at learning or understanding
08. Incomplete use of arms or fingers
09. Difficulty gripping or holding things
10. Incomplete use of feet or legs
11. Nervous or emotional condition
12. Restriction in physical activities or work
13. Disfigurement or deformity
14. Mental illness
15. Head injury, stroke or other brain damage
16. Other disability type(s)
17. Not applicable

Nervous and emotional conditions were included with mental illness as they covered a range of mental health conditions e.g. anxiety disorders, stress and nervous tension, obsessive compulsive disorder, autism, schizophrenia.

All broad areas of activity where assistance is required or difficulty experienced includes the 10 categories in Table 2 plus non applicable. This variable excludes difficulty experienced in accessing and using public transport.

Home and Family
Social and registered marital status was combined in Figure 2. Those in a de facto relationship may have been widowed, separated, divorced or never married.

The family and household characteristics presented in Figure 3 are based on data from family and household type. These variables are for people living in private dwellings but the non-applicable category is a proxy for those living in non-private dwellings.

The housing tenure categories were collapsed combining home owner without and with a mortgage, renter, rent-free and other which included life tenure scheme and participant of rent/buy (or shared
Socio-Economic Well-being

The socio-economic status of persons with disability was investigated using data for persons aged 15 years or more, living in households. The first SDAC variable examined was main source of cash income. This includes the categories of:

00. Not applicable
01. Wages or salary (including from own incorporated business)
02. Government pension or allowance
03. Child support or maintenance
04. Superannuation, an annuity or private pension
05. Workers’ compensation
06. Rental property
07. Unincorporated business or share in a partnership
08. Dividends and/or interest
09. Other source of income
10. No sources of income
11. Not known
12. Not stated

For the purposes of the study wages or salary, Government pension or allowance and no source of income were retained and all other sources grouped together under ‘other’.

The second variable was type of government pension, allowance or benefit received which has 21 response categories.

Total weekly cash income deciles, at the person level, were converted to quintiles to examine income inequality. The deciles are based on all persons aged 15 years or more, living in households – not just the 15-64 year age group. Cumulative distributions were then constructed to show differences in proportions of individuals at each quintile.

The final socio-economic variable investigated was the ABS Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (IRSD). This is calculated for households and at a State level. The deciles for IRSD also were converted to quintiles.

Education and training

Seven SDAC variables were used to examine difficulties that people with disability face in terms of education and training. These were:

- Age left school
- Highest year of school completed
- Level of highest educational attainment
- Level of highest non-school qualification
- Main field of highest non-school qualification
- Full-time or part-time study status
- Type of support or special arrangements provided at school or institution (multiple responses apply; persons aged 5 years or more with a disability, living in households, currently attending school or educational institution).

The first six variables pertained to persons aged 15 years or more, living in households. The education qualification and attainment variables are based on the Australian Standard Classification of Education (ASCED). The population surveyed were persons aged 15 years or more, living in households. The full range of categories for these variables can be found in the SDAC data item list available from the ABS or from Tablebuilder.
Participation in paid work
The primary variable of interest was labour force status and full-time/part-time status. The categories in Table 5 are those from the SDAC but with unemployed looking for part-time and full-time work being combined.

The other variables reported on were:

- Occupation in (main) job - broad groupings (respondents being persons aged 15 years or more, living in households, who are employed).
- Whether would like a job with more hours (respondents being Persons aged 15 years or more, living in households, who are employed and usually work 34 hours or less per week).
- Main reason for difficulty in finding work (respondents being persons aged 15 years or more, living in households, who are unemployed or not in the labour force and have looked for work in the last four weeks).
- Other employer arrangements necessary to work because of condition(s) (multiple response, Persons aged 15-64 with a disability, living in households, who are either wage or salary earners, or are able to work (i.e. not permanently unable to work), excluding those who are retired, have reported they are too old or don’t want to work).

Occupations are classified according to Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations (ANZSCO).

Participation in Social, Community and Civic Activities
Attention concentrated on variables identifying whether or not individuals had:

- attended selected cultural venues and events in the last 12 months
- participated in physical activities for sport, exercise or recreation or as a spectator in last 12 months
- an active involvement in group(s) in the last 12 months by type of organisation
  a. community (multiple response)
  b. governance/civic (multiple response)

In addition, information was also obtained on going to a restaurant or club, and volunteering using the variable ‘Social or community participation away from home in the last three months <multiple response>’.

The respondents to all of these questions were persons aged 5 years or more with a disability, living in households.

Transport
Access to and use of both private and public transport was investigated.

‘Driver status’ included information on whether or not a person aged 17 years or more with a disability, living in households, had a driver’s licence and the frequency at which they drove. The variable ‘Extent of difficulty travelling because of disability or age’ identified the need to be driven -

0. Not applicable
1. Always needs to be driven
2. Sometimes needs to be driven
3. Does not need to be driven but difficulty travelling without assistance
4. No difficulty travelling without assistance
5. Need to be driven or difficulty not related to disability or age
6. Does not leave home

There is a separate variable in SDAC identifying a person’s need for assistance with private transport.

In terms of public transport, two variables were examined: ability to use public transport; and whether public transport is available in respondent’s area. Response to these questions was sought for persons aged 5 years or more with a disability, living in households.
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