



Australian Government

Australian Institute of  
Health and Welfare

# Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in community living

While people with disability participate actively in all aspects of Australian life, they can face additional challenges doing so.

This fact sheet uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) to look at selected changes between 2003 and 2015 for people with disability in one life area—inclusion and participation in community living (see Box 1 and ‘Where can I find out more?’).

In this fact sheet, community living relates primarily to living arrangements and engagement in social and community activities for people with disability living in the community. Information on participation and inclusion of people with disability in other aspects of daily life in Australia—such as in education and employment—is available in separately published fact sheets.

## Fast facts

In 2015, of people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community:

- around 1 in 3 did not go out as often as they would have liked, almost unchanged from 2003
- more than 1 in 4 found it difficult to access buildings or facilities in the community in the previous 12 months
- around 2 in 5 had avoided community situations in the previous 12 months because of their disability
- around 1 in 7 had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months.

## Box 1: The ABS SDAC

In the SDAC, a person is considered to have disability if they have at least one of a list of limitations, restrictions or impairments, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities. The severity of disability is further defined according to the degree of assistance or supervision required in core activities—self-care, mobility, and communication—and grouped for mild, moderate, severe, and profound limitation. People with disability can also be identified as having a schooling or employment restriction. More information on the survey is available on the ABS website at: [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0).

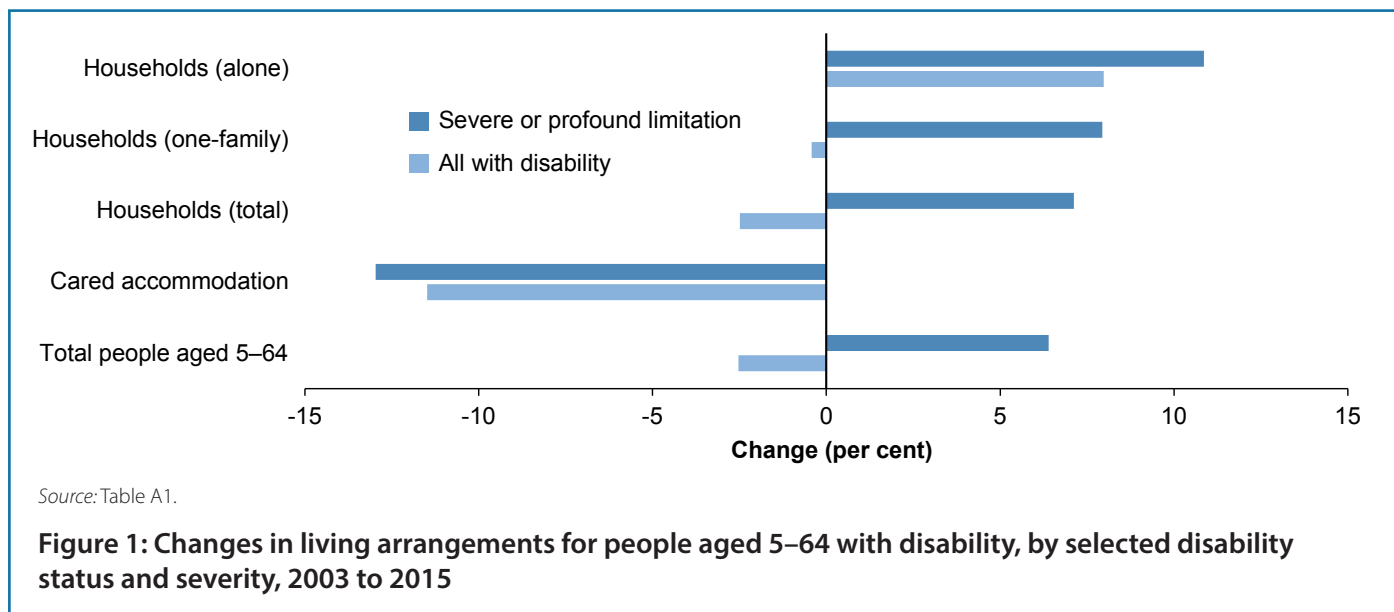
## Living arrangements

There has been a long-term shift towards supporting people with disability to live at home or in the community, rather than in institutional style accommodation. This is reflected in how living arrangements have changed over time for people with disability, particularly for those with severe or profound limitation (a subset of people with disability—see Box 1).

## Most people with disability live in the community

In 2015, the majority of people aged 5–64 with disability were living in the community (that is, in households), with less than 1% of those with disability, and 2% of those with severe or profound limitation, living in cared accommodation (Table A1).

While proportionally this was similar to 2003, the number living in cared accommodation fell between 2003 and 2015 (Figure 1). People with severe or profound limitation, in particular, were less likely to be living in cared accommodation than in earlier years. This shift was partly driven by changes for young people—in 2015, 1 in 500 people aged 5–29 with severe or profound limitation were living in cared accommodation, compared with around 1 in 100 in 2003, and 1 in 7 in 1981 (ABS 2016; AIHW 2008).



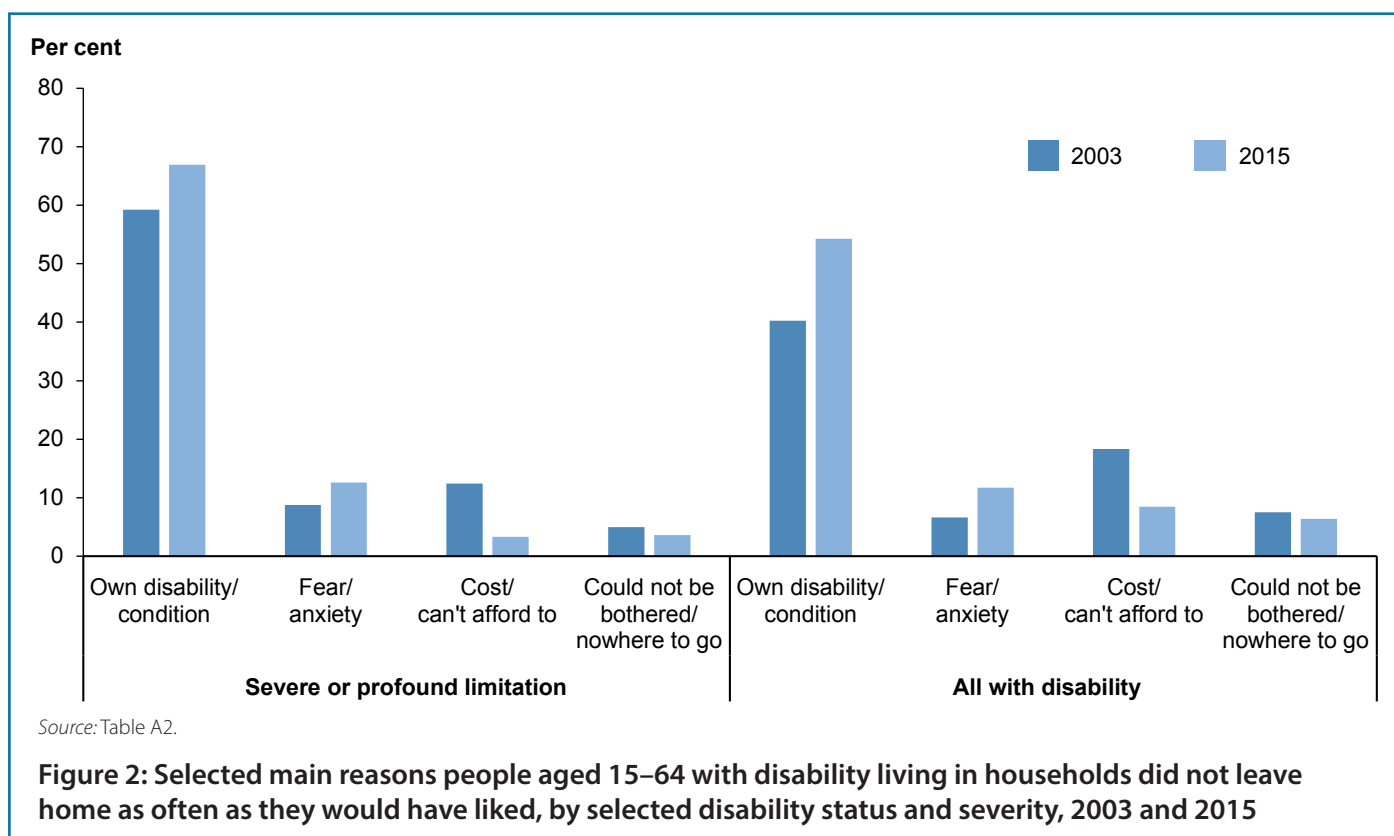
## Social and community activities

### Many people with disability did not leave home as often as they would have liked

In 2015, nearly 1 in 3 people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community (30%), and around half of those with severe or profound limitation (51%), did not go out as often as they would have liked (Table A2). This was almost unchanged from that reported in 2003 (31% and 51%, respectively).

While the most common main reason given in both years for not leaving home as often as they would have liked was their own disability or condition, a higher proportion reported it as the main reason in 2015—54% of people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community, and 67% of those with severe or profound limitation, compared with 40% and 59%, respectively, in 2003 (Figure 2).

For both groups, the proportion who reported fear or anxiety as the main reason they did not leave home as often as they would have liked also increased, while the proportion who reported cost or affordability as the main reason decreased.



### Most people with disability participated in at least one social or community activity at home and away from home in the previous 3 months

In 2015, almost all people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community had participated in at least one social or community activity in the previous 3 months at home (96% of those with disability, and 93% of those with severe or profound limitation) or away from home (94% of those with disability, and 89% of those with severe or profound limitation) (tables A3 and A4). This was similar to that reported in 2003.

The most common social or community activity participated in at home was contact with friends or relatives (Table A3). In 2015, almost all people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community had telephone calls from friends or relatives (89%), or had been visited at home by friends or relatives (86%) in the previous 3 months. This was slightly lower for those with severe or profound limitation (81% and 83%, respectively).

The most common activity participated in away from home was visiting friends or relatives. In 2015, 87% of people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community had done so in the previous 3 months. This was lower among those with severe or profound limitation (80%) (Table A4).

In 2015, 38% of people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community, and 43% of those with severe or profound limitation, reported wanting more contact with family or friends who did not live with them (ABS 2016).

### Most people with disability had made a trip in the previous 2 weeks

The majority of people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community had taken a trip in the previous 2 weeks. In 2015, 95% of those with disability, and 92% of those with severe or profound limitation, had made a trip in the previous 2 weeks. This was similar to that reported in 2003 (96% and 95%, respectively) (Table A6).

The most common destination of peoples' last trip in the previous 2 weeks was shopping. For 30% of those with disability who had gone out in the previous fortnight, and 33% of those with severe or profound limitation, their last trip was shopping. This was almost unchanged from 2003 (29% and 31%, respectively).

The second most common destination was work—for 28% of those with disability, and 11% of those with severe or profound limitation. This was down slightly from 2003 (30% and 16%, respectively).

## **The majority of people with disability had a driver's licence**

Being able to participate in the community is affected by many factors, including the ability to get around. Being able to drive, for example, might allow increased participation and freedom of movement as there can be limitations in relying on other people, services, or public transport for getting around away from home.

In 2015, 84% of people aged 17–64 with disability living in the community, and 64% of those with severe or profound limitation, had a driver's licence (Table A5). While the proportion who did not hold a driver's licence was similar over time for those with disability (17% in 2003 and 16% in 2015), it increased slightly for those with severe or profound limitation (from 31% to 36%) (Table A5).

Around three-quarters (73%) of people aged 17–64 with disability living in the community who had a driver's licence reported driving every day in 2015, similar to that reported in 2003 (74%). Among those with severe or profound limitation, this decreased from 54% in 2003 to 46% in 2015.

## **Discrimination**

For various reasons, people with disability might not participate fully in community life. They may experience additional difficulties with access and their participation and inclusion in various aspects of daily life can also be influenced by community attitudes and discrimination. In 2015, the SDAC introduced a new module on discrimination to estimate and contextualise these experiences for people with disability.

## **Some people with disability found it difficult to access buildings or facilities in the community**

The physical environment can present a barrier to how people with disability participate in community life. Public spaces, in particular, might be full of obstacles that make participating in every-day activities—such as shopping or attending an event—more difficult.

In 2015, more than 1 in 4 people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community (27%), and around 1 in 3 of those with severe or profound limitation (32%), had found it difficult to access buildings or facilities in the community in the previous 12 months (Table A7). Access difficulties were commonly related to the design of buildings and their surrounds. For example, of those who had difficulty accessing a building or facility in the previous 12 months:

- for around 2 in 3, the difficulty related to getting around the building, such as stairs, internal doors, or corridor widths (64% with disability, and 63% with severe or profound limitation)
- for around 2 in 5, the difficulty related to approach areas, such as ramps, handrails and lighting (41% with disability, and 44% with severe or profound limitation) (Table A8).

## Some people with disability found using public transport difficult

Difficulties accessing public transport can affect people's ability to participate in community life. In 2015, while most people with disability aged 15–64 living in the community reported no difficulty using public transport (72%), only 32% of those with severe or profound disability had no difficulty (ABS 2016).

The most common types of difficulty related to access—such as steps, difficulty getting to the stops or stations, and lack of seating or difficulty standing.

## Some people with disability avoided community situations because of their disability

In 2015, around 2 in 5 people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community (41%), and nearly 2 in 3 of those with severe or profound limitation (62%), had avoided community situations because of their disability in the previous 12 months (Table A9).

The most common type of situation both groups avoided was visiting family or friends (44% and 51%, respectively).

## People with disability experienced discrimination from various sources

In 2015, around 1 in 7 people aged 15–64 with disability living in the community (14%), and around 1 in 5 of those with severe or profound limitation (22%), had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months (Table A10).

Common sources of discrimination were employers, work colleagues, family or friends, strangers in the street, and health staff. For people with disability who had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months:

- 27% reported the source as an employer
- 24% as family or friends
- 20% as strangers in the street
- 18% as work colleagues
- 17% as health staff.

For people with severe or profound limitation who had experienced discrimination in the previous 12 months:

- 31% reported the source as strangers in the street
- 24% as family or friends
- 19% as health staff
- 15% as work colleagues
- 14% as an employer.

## Where can I find out more?

This fact sheet is accompanied by separately published tables, and is part of a series of releases on disability. These are available at: <[www.aihw.gov.au/disability-publications](http://www.aihw.gov.au/disability-publications)>.

The SDAC is considered the best source for estimating the prevalence of disability in Australia, and is the source of the information included in this fact sheet. For more information on, and publications from, the survey, see: <[www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0)>.

Monitoring disability prevalence provides information on various issues relevant to social and economic policies and service planning, but it is only part of the picture. Information from other sources is needed to complement such data, and to present a more complete picture of the experiences of, and outcomes for, people with disability as they take part in various aspects of life in Australia. Sources of additional information include, but are not limited to, administrative data on government services and payments, including those from mainstream services (that is, those that are not disability specific). For example, other sources of data on people with disability include the Disability Services National Minimum Data Set at: <[www.aihw.gov.au/disability-publications](http://www.aihw.gov.au/disability-publications)>, and the National Disability Insurance Agency at: <[www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au)>.

## References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2016. Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015, TableBuilder. Canberra: ABS.

AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) 2008. Disability in Australia: trends in prevalence, education, employment and community living. Cat. no. AUS 103. Canberra: AIHW.

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