

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Project brief

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) was commissioned by the National Disability Administrators (NDA) to conduct a study of disability and ageing. This project is designed to provide information to assist disability support service providers and senior policy makers faced with such questions as:

- a) What is the most relevant, reliable information about population ageing?
- b) What are the ageing trends of people with a disability?
- c) At what ages are what types of assistance needed?
- d) What implications for disability support services arise from the overall ageing of the population?
- e) Can we usefully distinguish between disability clients and aged care clients, with respect to their need for services? When is a person's requirement for assistance a result of ageing rather than the onset of disability at an earlier age, and does any such distinction have implications for the nature of services provided?
- f) What are trends in informal care? How might these trends interact with population factors to affect demand for disability services into the future?
- g) What projections can reliably be made about the population with disability over 10-, 20- and 30-year time frames?
- h) What inferences can be made about future needs for support services over these time frames?

Stages, methods and resulting products of the project are set out below.

### Stage 1: Literature review

A review of studies of disability and ageing was undertaken, searching specifically for information on:

- underlying explanations of age-related disability rates and trends, including:
  - trends in life expectancy of people with disability, including possible cohort analysis of specific disability groups;
  - explanatory analyses of age-related disability rates, with investigation of the possible statistical separation of 'age' and 'disability' effects; and
- patterns and relationships of caring among older carers, and for older people with disability, including the assessment of social and population factors affecting the availability of informal care.

This review embraced not only published literature, but also studies now being conducted in Australian policy departments and universities (Chapters 1 to 10).

## **Stage 2: Australian population implications**

Data from the four Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) disability surveys and other surveys or administrative data of national significance were reviewed and analysed for what they might yield on questions (a) to (h) above, and for their possible confirmation of key findings from the literature review (Chapters 11 to 16).

## **Stage 3: Support service implications**

This stage of the project drew together the results of the two preceding stages, to provide information to address the study questions and to examine implications for support services. Analyses of service use patterns and implications for future service use were prepared, and scenarios of future service provision and use, and availability of informal care, were discussed (Chapters 17, 18 and 19).

# **1.2 Background and outline of the report**

## **What is ageing?**

The process of ageing is complex and influenced by a variety of factors. Thus, the study of ageing can involve many aspects. Population groups may differ in terms of the factors that affect both individual and population ageing. For a particular cohort these factors may vary over time in terms of the nature of their impact and their relative importance (e.g. Binstock & George 1990; Manton 1990; McPherson 1990; Borowski et al. 1997; Gibson 1998).

In this report a distinction is drawn between the ageing of an individual and the ageing of a population. Population ageing is viewed from a demographic perspective and individual ageing from a social perspective, with a particular focus on people with a disability.

The report examines these two aspects and looks at how changes in the ageing process interact with other factors to affect prevalence of disability and demand for disability services.

Population ageing is a result of the interaction of three basic demographic components: fertility, mortality and migration. Population ageing is indicated by an increase in the proportion of older people. This is mainly attributable to lower fertility and an increase in the absolute number of older people, with the latter largely a result of lower mortality among older people and a large birth cohort ageing (e.g. when the baby-boom generation enters old age). While substantial immigration may reduce the extent of population ageing, it cannot 'keep the population young' (McDonald & Kippen 1999). Significant fluctuations in cohort size resulting from substantial changes in the basic demographic components will affect the ageing process. The time of onset, the speed and scale of the population ageing process have great social and economic impact on both individuals and society.

Individual ageing refers to the structural, sensory, motor, behavioural and cognitive changes in a person over time, in particular relating to how these factors influence opportunities and lifestyle at various stages of the life of the person (McPherson 1990: 4). Although ageing is inevitable, universal and irreversible, it is a multi-dimensional, dynamic process. It involves an interaction of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors, which may result in different rates and types of ageing for a particular individual or cohort (McPherson 1990).

Individual ageing has been conceptualised using three broad dimensions to examine the biological, psychological and social changes that result from increasing chronological age.

There has been a widening from an earlier focus on the medical and biological aspects of ageing to a broader view encompassing these three dimensions (e.g. Hayslip & Panek 1989; McPherson 1990).

Chronological ageing is only an approximate measure of the development or changes within an individual. There are substantial variations in the rate of physical, emotional, social and psychological development between individuals. Biological ageing takes into account individual differences. Biological ageing mainly reflects the relationship between biological maturation or deterioration and changes in an individual's ability to adapt and perform specific physical, cognitive and social tasks (McPherson 1990).

Psychological ageing involves the reaction of the individual to biological, cognitive, sensory, motor, emotional and behavioural changes and to external environmental factors affecting these changes (McPherson 1990).

Ageing is not only a biological and psychological process but also a social process. Social ageing refers to patterns of interaction between the ageing individual and the social system within which they live (McPherson 1990).

To study people with a disability who are ageing, we should consider not only their chronological age, but also these three dimensions of individual ageing, in particular, those elements that relate specifically to their disability.

## **Outline of the report**

Chapters 1 to 10 of the report focus mainly on literature review. The first part (Chapters 1 to 5) of the literature review presents an overview of the ageing of the Australian population and its impact on prevalence of disability, expenditure and services for people ageing with a disability. The combined effects of population ageing and de-institutionalisation on informal care are reviewed. The second part (Chapters 6 to 10) reviews the ageing trends of people with a disability, particularly those with an early onset disability, and outlines their special needs for support. Emerging issues related to service needs for ageing people with a disability and service development and planning are also discussed.

Chapters 11 to 17 assess the key findings of the literature review in the context of Australian population data analysis. Data from the ABS disability surveys, other population surveys of national significance and service administrative data are reviewed. Analysis of the most recent population survey data, in particular the 1998 ABS disability survey data, forms an important part of these chapters.

Chapter 18 summarises the main themes and findings of previous chapters to examine the impact of ageing on support service provision, government expenditure and informal assistance for people with a disability. Chapter 19 discusses service implications associated with the changes in the needs for support services and scenarios of future trends in service use. The chapter draws out the most salient information on ageing and disability for disability administrators to consider when planning the evolution of services.