

## ICF and Australian national data standards

Quality data are needed for a wide range of purposes in the health and community services fields. The basis of good data is well-defined data items. The ICF provides a framework to support the development of quality data items on functioning and disability and improve data reliability between administrative and population data collections.

National data dictionaries are crucial for achieving quality and consistency in national data. They provide a menu of standard data elements from which minimum data sets can be developed. The development and revision of data definitions involves consultation with national information experts and data committees such as the Advisory Committee on Australian and International Disability Data and the National Community Services Data Committee. A set of 15 disability data items based on the ICF are now in the National Community Services Data Dictionary and are being proposed for inclusion in the National Health Data Dictionary.

Consistency across administrative and population data collections is crucial for the development of meaningful policy and appropriate service delivery. Administrative data are more powerful when they are comparable across time, location, and service program areas. Similarly, when statistics produced from administrative sources are comparable with those from surveys and censuses, information on the needs and characteristics of particular population groups can be related to information on relevant service programs.

## Achievements and applications of the ICF in Australia

- Improved consistency of data relating to support needs for people with disability between:
  - Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
  - Commonwealth-State/Territory Disability Agreement National Minimum Data Set
  - The National Community Services Data Dictionary
  - 2006 Census of Population and Housing
- Use in an allied health outcome measure: Australian Therapy Outcome Measures (AusTOMS)
- Inclusion in allied health teaching curricula to assist students in their understanding of disability
- Use in Rett syndrome research to identify factors most likely to optimise quality of life of affected children
- The unification of classifications used in disability athletics
- Use in oral health measures to effectively capture adverse impacts of oral health on wellbeing

### For more information:

- The WHO ICF site is at:  
[www3.who.int/icf/icftemplate.cfm](http://www3.who.int/icf/icftemplate.cfm)
- The ICF Australian user guide:  
[www.aihw.gov.au/disability/icf/index.html](http://www.aihw.gov.au/disability/icf/index.html)
- The National Community Services Data Dictionary Knowledgebase online:  
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/knowledgebase/index.html>

## Introduction to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)



The collaborating centre for the WHO Family of International Classifications in Australia



**Australian Government**

**Australian Institute of Health and Welfare**

## What is the ICF?

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) has been developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) for use in describing functioning and disability. In May 2001, the World Health Assembly endorsed the ICF.

The ICF is now recognised as a reference member of the World Health Organization Family of International Classifications, and complementary to the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD). The ICF is also a member of the Australian Family of Health and Related Classifications.

## Components of the ICF

The ICF defines functioning and disability as multi-dimensional concepts, relating to:

- The body functions and structures of people;
- The activities people do and the life areas in which they participate; and
- The factors in their environment that affect these experiences.

For each of these components, the ICF provides a hierarchy of classifications and codes. In the ICF, a person's functioning or disability is conceived as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and environmental and personal factors (Fig 1.1).

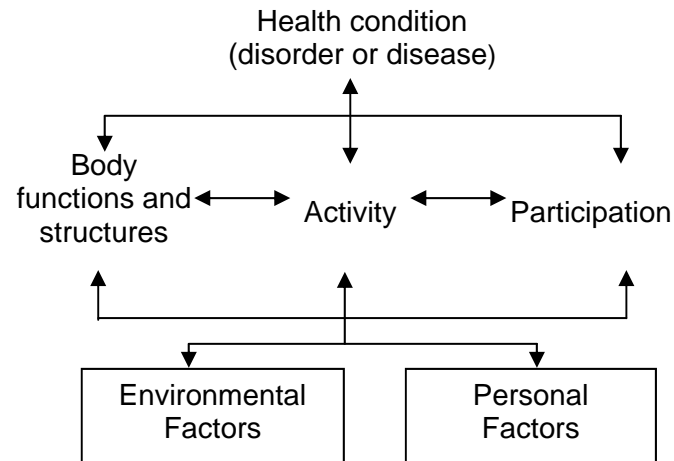


Figure 1.1: Interactions between components of the ICF

Source: WHO 2001, International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health

## Definitions of components

**Body functions** are the physiological functions of body systems (including psychological functions).

**Body structures** are anatomical parts of the body, such as organs, limbs and their components.

**Impairments** are problems in body function and structure, such as significant deviation or loss.

**Activity** is the execution of a task or action by an individual.

**Participation** is involvement in a life situation.

**Activity limitations** are difficulties an individual may have in performing activities.

**Participation restrictions** are problems an individual may experience in involvement in life situations.

**Environmental factors** make up the physical, social and attitudinal environment in which people live and conduct their lives.

## Value of using the ICF in Australia

The ICF provides a common framework and language to support the development of better policies and services to meet the needs of people with a disability. The ICF:

- combines the major models of disability, recognising the role of environmental factors in the creation of disability and the importance of participation as a desired outcome, as well as the underlying health conditions;
- is in tune with current trends towards a greater focus on long-term health and functional outcomes in the health and community services fields;
- presents an overarching conceptual framework for the development and analysis of 'joined up data' to support whole-of-government policies;
- incorporates key concepts from a wide range of fields relating to human functioning, and offers an extensive 'menu' from which suitable topics can be selected for the design of information systems, or for targeted clinical or research applications; and
- provides detailed, hierarchical sets of codes to assist in the collection of data.