

**Open employment  
services for people  
with disabilities  
1995–96 and 1996–97**

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# **Open employment services for people with disabilities 1995–96 and 1996–97**

**Phil Anderson  
and  
Louise Golley**

**1998**

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
Canberra

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# Contents

List of tables	vii
List of figures	xii
Acknowledgments	xv
<b>Summary</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>1 Introduction: employment and people with disabilities</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Disability in Australia .....	2
1.2 Employment services in Australia .....	5
1.3 NIMS data system and its development .....	5
<b>2 Service providers</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Numbers of open employment NIMS sites .....	7
2.2 Staff numbers .....	8
2.3 Staff and client numbers .....	10
2.4 Open employment NIMS sites and predominant disability types .....	12
<b>3 Client characteristics</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4 Job characteristics</b>	<b>27</b>
4.1 Numbers of jobs .....	27
4.2 Wages of jobs .....	32
4.3 Job hours per week .....	34
4.4 Reasons for jobs ending .....	37
4.5 Duration of jobs .....	39
<b>5 Job experience of clients</b>	<b>47</b>
5.1 Job history .....	47
5.2 Measures of job experience .....	52
5.3 Job experience by sex .....	54
5.4 Job experience by age .....	55
5.5 Job experience by Indigenous and South Sea Islander status .....	57
5.6 Job experience by preferred spoken language .....	58
5.7 Job experience by type and nature of primary disability .....	58
5.8 Job experience and presence of other disability .....	60

5.9	Job experience and frequency of assistance required for activities of daily living.....	60
5.10	Job experience and type of living arrangement.....	62
5.11	Job experience and disability panel endorsement.....	63
5.12	Job experience, client type and referral source .....	63
5.13	Job experience, employment basis, occupation and industry .....	65
5.14	Job experience by State and Territory.....	70
5.15	Job experience and location.....	71
<b>6</b>	<b>Client support</b>	<b>73</b>
6.1	Total hours of support.....	73
6.2	Support for workers and non-workers.....	75
6.3	Client support and client characteristics .....	80
6.4	Client support and characteristics of primary job.....	102
6.5	Client support by State or Territory and location.....	105
	<b>Appendix 1: Client support profiles over time</b>	<b>107</b>
	<b>Appendix 2: Technical notes</b>	<b>119</b>
	<b>Glossary</b>	<b>123</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>125</b>

## List of tables

Table S1:	Number of open employment sites by State and Territory, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	xviii
Table S2:	Number of sites by location, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	xviii
Table S3:	Job history of workers during 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	xxi
Table 1.1:	People with a handicap: severity of handicap by sex and age as a percentage of the Australian population of that sex and age, Australia, 1993 .....	3
Table 1.2:	People aged 15 to 64 years living in households: living arrangement, main source of income and employment status, by severity of handicap and disability status (percentage distribution), Australia, 1993 .....	4
Table 2.1:	Number of sites and clients by State and Territory, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	8
Table 2.2:	Number of sites by location, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	8
Table 2.3:	Number of equivalent full-time staff, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	9
Table 2.4:	Number of sites: distribution of paid and unpaid staff, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	9
Table 2.5:	Number of sites: equivalent full-time paid staff, support and administration, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	10
Table 2.6:	Sites: total site staff numbers by number of clients, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	11
Table 2.7:	Sites grouped by client primary disability type: numbers of sites and clients, 1996–97.....	13
Table 3.1:	Number of clients by sex and age, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	15
Table 3.2:	Number of clients who ceased support by reason for ceasing support, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	17
Table 3.3:	Number of clients by origin, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	17
Table 3.4:	Number of clients by country of birth, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	18
Table 3.5:	Number of clients by most common preferred languages, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	18
Table 3.6:	Number of clients by type of accommodation, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	19
Table 3.7:	Number of clients by primary disability type and sex, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	19
Table 3.8:	Number of clients by primary disability and episodic nature of disability, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	20
Table 3.9:	Number of clients by primary disability type, by presence or absence of other disability and by sex, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	21
Table 3.10:	Number of clients by primary disability type and frequency of ADL assistance, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	23
Table 3.11:	Number of clients by client type, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	25
Table 3.12:	Number of clients by disability panel status, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	25
Table 3.13:	Number of clients by referral source, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	26
Table 4.1:	Number of jobs per client during 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	27
Table 4.2:	Number of jobs by industry of employer, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	28

Table 4.3:	Number of jobs by primary disability type and occupation of client, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	30
Table 4.4:	Number of jobs by employment basis, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	32
Table 4.5:	Number of jobs by weekly wages, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	33
Table 4.6:	Number of jobs by occupation and wage level, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	34
Table 4.7:	Number of jobs by hours worked per week, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	35
Table 4.8:	Number of jobs by primary disability type of client and hours worked per week, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	36
Table 4.9:	Number of jobs by weekly wage and hours worked per week, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	37
Table 4.10:	Number of completed jobs by job end reason, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	38
Table 4.11:	Number of jobs current at 30 June 1996 by employer’s industry type and duration of job .....	39
Table 4.12:	Number of jobs current at 30 June 1997 by employer’s industry type and duration of job .....	40
Table 4.13:	Number of jobs completed between 1 July 1995 and 30 June 1996, by employer’s industry type and duration of job .....	42
Table 4.14:	Number of jobs completed between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997 by employer’s industry type and duration of job .....	43
Table 4.15:	Number of jobs current at 30 June 1996 by occupation type and duration of job.....	44
Table 4.16:	Number of jobs current at 30 June 1997 by occupation type and duration of job.....	44
Table 4.17:	Number of jobs completed between 1 July 1995 and 30 June 1996 by occupation type and duration of job .....	45
Table 4.18:	Number of jobs completed between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997 by occupation type and duration of job .....	45
Table 5.1:	Classification of job history for workers in a financial year .....	47
Table 5.2:	Job history of workers during 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	48
Table 5.3:	Job history of workers from 1995–96 to 1996–97 .....	49
Table 5.4:	Workers, basis of employment of primary job by job history, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	50
Table 5.5:	Reason for job(s) ending, by job history, for workers who finished one or more jobs, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	51
Table 5.6:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by job history, 1995–96.....	53
Table 5.7:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by job history, 1996–97.....	54
Table 5.8:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by sex, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	55
Table 5.9:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by age, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	56

Table 5.10:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by whether Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	57
Table 5.11:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by preferred spoken language, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	58
Table 5.12:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by primary disability type, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	59
Table 5.13:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by episodic nature of primary disability, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	59
Table 5.14:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by presence of other disability, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	60
Table 5.15:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by frequency of assistance required for activities of daily living (ADL), 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	61
Table 5.16:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by type of living arrangement, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	62
Table 5.17:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by disability panel status, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	63
Table 5.18:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by client type, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	64
Table 5.19:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by referral source, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	64
Table 5.20:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by basis of employment of primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	65
Table 5.21:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by occupation group of primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	66
Table 5.22:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by industry of primary job, 1995–96.....	67
Table 5.23:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by industry of primary job, 1996–97.....	68
Table 5.24:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by State and Territory, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	70
Table 5.25:	Workers: number of jobs, weeks to get job, time in work, hours of work and income earned from jobs, by location, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	71

Table 5.26:	Workers: employment status of primary job by location, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	71
Table 6.1:	Number of support hours by support category and sex of client, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	73
Table 6.2:	Number of direct support hours by primary disability type and support category, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	74
Table 6.3:	Mean hours of support per client by job history, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	75
Table 6.4:	Workers: mean hours of support per worker by job history and number of jobs, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	76
Table 6.5:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by sex, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	81
Table 6.6:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by age group, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	83
Table 6.7:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by whether Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander descent, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	85
Table 6.8:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by preferred spoken language, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	86
Table 6.9:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by type of primary disability, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	89
Table 6.10:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by episodic nature of primary disability, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	93
Table 6.11:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by presence of other disability, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	93
Table 6.12:	Support per client for workers and non-workers, by frequency of ADL assistance required, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	95
Table 6.13:	Mean hours of support per client for workers and non-workers, by type of living arrangement, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	98
Table 6.14:	Mean hours of support per client for workers and non-workers, by disability panel endorsement status, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	99
Table 6.15:	Mean hours of support per client for workers and non-workers, by client type, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	99
Table 6.16:	Mean hours of support per client for workers and non-workers, by referral source, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	101
Table 6.17:	Mean hours of support per worker, by basis of employment for primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	102
Table 6.18:	Mean hours of support per worker, by occupation group of primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	103
Table 6.19:	Mean hours of support per worker, by industry of primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	104
Table 6.20:	Mean hours of support per client for workers and non-workers, by State or Territory, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	105
Table 6.21:	Mean hours of support per client for workers and non-workers, by location of agency site, 1995–96, 1996–97.....	106

Table A1:	Mean support hours per four-week period for all non-workers, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	108
Table A2:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	108
Table A3:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	108
Table A4:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and lost a job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	109
Table A5:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who lost a job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	109
Table A6:	Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by sex, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	110
Table A7:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by sex, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	110
Table A8:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by sex, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	110
Table A9:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, by age, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	111
Table A10:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by age, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	111
Table A11:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by age, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	112
Table A12:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by origin, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	112
Table A13:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, by preferred spoken language, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	113
Table A14:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by preferred spoken language, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	113
Table A15:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by preferred spoken language, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	113
Table A16:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, by primary disability type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	114
Table A17:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by primary disability type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	114
Table A18:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by primary disability type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	115
Table A19:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, by presence or absence of other disability, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	115
Table A20:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by presence or absence of other disability, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	116

Table A21:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by presence or absence of other disability, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	116
Table A22:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, by frequency of ADL assistance, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	116
Table A23:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by frequency of ADL assistance, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	117
Table A24:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by frequency of ADL assistance, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	117
Table A25:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, by client type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	118
Table A26:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, by client type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	118
Table A27:	Mean support hours per four-week period for 'job retained' workers, by client type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	118

## List of figures

Figure S1:	Number of clients by age group, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	xix
Figure S2:	Percentage of clients by primary disability type, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	xix
Figure S3:	Number of clients with and without jobs, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	xx
Figure S4:	Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, and workers with continuous jobs, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	xxii
Figure S5:	Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	xxiii
Figure 2.1:	Total site staff numbers by number of clients, 1996–97 .....	11
Figure 2.2:	Percentage of clients attending sites with 25% or more of client's disability type, 1996–97 .....	14
Figure 3.1a:	Number of clients by age group for males, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	16
Figure 3.1b:	Number of clients by age group for females, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	16
Figure 3.2:	Percentage of clients by primary disability type, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	20
Figure 3.3:	Percentage of clients with more than one disability by primary disability type, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	22
Figure 3.4:	Number of clients by primary disability type and frequency of assistance required for activities of daily living, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	23
Figure 3.5:	Percentage of clients requiring frequent or continual ADL assistance, by primary disability type, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	24
Figure 4.1:	Percentage of jobs by industry, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	29
Figure 4.2:	Percentage of jobs by occupation group, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	31
Figure 4.3:	Number of jobs by primary disability for the four most common occupation groups, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	31
Figure 4.4:	Number of jobs by employment basis, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	32

Figure 4.5: Percentage of jobs by weekly wage, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	33
Figure 4.6: Number of jobs by hours worked per week, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	35
Figure 4.7: Percentage of completed jobs by reason for job ending, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	38
Figure 4.8: Duration of current jobs, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	41
Figure 4.9: Duration of complete and current jobs, 1996–97 .....	41
Figure 5.1: Job history of workers during 1996–97 .....	48
Figure 5.2: Mean hourly wage rate by age of worker, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	56
Figure 5.3: Mean hours worked per work week by age of worker, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	57
Figure 5.4: Mean hourly wage rate by frequency of ADL assistance required, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	61
Figure 5.5: Mean hourly wage rate by selected industries of primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	69
Figure 5.6: Mean wage per work week by selected industries of primary job, 1995–96, 1996–97 .....	69
Figure 6.1: Mean support hours per four-week period for all non-workers, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	77
Figure 6.2: Mean support hours per four-week period for ‘job retained’ workers with one continuous job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	77
Figure 6.3: Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	79
Figure 6.4: Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and lost a job—pre-job and in-job phases, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	79
Figure 6.5: Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who lost a job—in-job and post-job phases, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	80
Figure 6.6: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by sex, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	81
Figure 6.7: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by sex, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	82
Figure 6.8: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the ‘job gained’ category, by sex, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	82
Figure 6.9: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by age, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	84
Figure 6.10: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by age, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	84
Figure 6.11: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the ‘job gained’ category, by age, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	85
Figure 6.12: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the ‘job gained’ category, by origin, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	86
Figure 6.13: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by preferred spoken language, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	87

Figure 6.14: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by preferred spoken language, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	87
Figure 6.15: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the 'job gained' category, by preferred spoken language, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997.....	88
Figure 6.16: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by primary disability type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	90
Figure 6.17: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by primary disability type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	91
Figure 6.18: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the 'job gained' category, by primary disability type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	92
Figure 6.19: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by presence or absence of other disability, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	94
Figure 6.20: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by presence or absence of other disability, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	94
Figure 6.21: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the 'job gained' category, by presence or absence of other disability, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	95
Figure 6.22: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by frequency of ADL assistance, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	96
Figure 6.23: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by frequency of ADL assistance required, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	97
Figure 6.24: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the 'job gained' category, by frequency of ADL assistance, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	97
Figure 6.25: Mean hours of support per four-week period for workers in the 'job gained' category, by client type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	100
Figure 6.26: Mean hours of support per four-week period for non-workers, by client type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	100
Figure 6.27: Mean hours of support per four-week period for continuous workers, by client type, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 .....	101

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# Summary

This report presents data on open employment services for people with disabilities and the clients of these services, from January 1995. The primary focus of the report is a comparison of the characteristics of services and the experiences of clients in the 1995–96 and 1996–97 financial years.

Data were collected via the National Information Management System (NIMS) for open employment services, introduced on 1 January 1995. The development and implementation of the system were financially supported by the Department of Health and Family Services. The AIHW became involved during the implementation phase and is now Data Manager of the system, working alongside an independent Industry Development Manager representing service providers in the ongoing use and development of the system.

## Employment and people with disabilities

**Chapter 1** provides an introduction to the subject matter of the report, describing open employment services in Australia and the population they serve.

People with a 'handicap' (in terms used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in their major disability survey) had much higher rates of unemployment in 1993 than the rest of the population; some 21.0% of people with a handicap were unemployed, compared with an estimate of 12.7% for the labour force overall. This inequality illustrates the potential role of specialist services which aim to help people with a disability to obtain and retain employment.

Under the Commonwealth *Disability Services Act 1986* employment services fall into two main categories: open employment services and supported employment services. In an **open employment service**, clients receive support from a service outlet but are directly employed by another organisation. In **supported employment services** clients are employed by the same organisation that provides the employment support. This report covers the activities of the open employment services only.

## Service providers

**Chapters 2 and 3** describe open employment services and their clients.

At the end of June 1996, there were 260 open employment sites using the NIMS system, of which 239 provided data. For the 12 months to 30 June 1997, 282 sites had installed NIMS systems, of which 268 provided data (Table S1). All States and Territories had open employment sites. In 1996–97 about three-quarters (75%) of all sites were in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland (Table S1). Some 66% of sites were in urban areas, 30% in rural areas and the remaining 4% in remote areas (Table S2).

**Table S1: Number of open employment sites by State and Territory, 1995–96, 1996–97**

State	1995–96					1996–97				
	Sites		Clients		Average clients per site	Sites		Clients		Average clients per site <sup>(a)</sup>
	Number	%	Number	%		Number	%	Number	%	
New South Wales	72	30.1	5,608	27.2	77.9	77	28.7	6,446	26.2	84.8
Victoria	60	25.1	6,613	32.1	110.2	66	24.6	8,063	32.8	122.2
Queensland	59	24.7	4,625	22.4	78.4	61	22.8	5,563	22.6	91.2
Western Australia	25	10.5	1,970	9.6	78.8	28	10.4	2,147	8.7	76.7
South Australia	8	3.3	906	4.4	113.3	14	5.2	1,120	4.6	86.2
Tasmania	6	2.5	281	1.4	46.8	8	3.0	360	1.5	45.0
Australian Capital Territory	7	2.9	527	2.6	75.3	9	3.4	730	3.0	81.1
Northern Territory	2	0.8	94	0.5	47.0	5	1.9	161	0.7	32.2
<b>Australia</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>20,624</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>86.3</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>24,590</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>92.4</b>

(a) When calculating the average number of clients per site, 1 site from New South Wales and 1 site from South Australia were omitted as records of support given were missing for all clients.

**Table S2: Number of sites by location, 1995–96, 1996–97**

Location	1995–96		1996–97	
	Number	%	Number	%
Urban	161	67.4	181	67.6
Rural	71	29.7	77	28.7
Remote	7	2.9	10	3.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100.0</b>

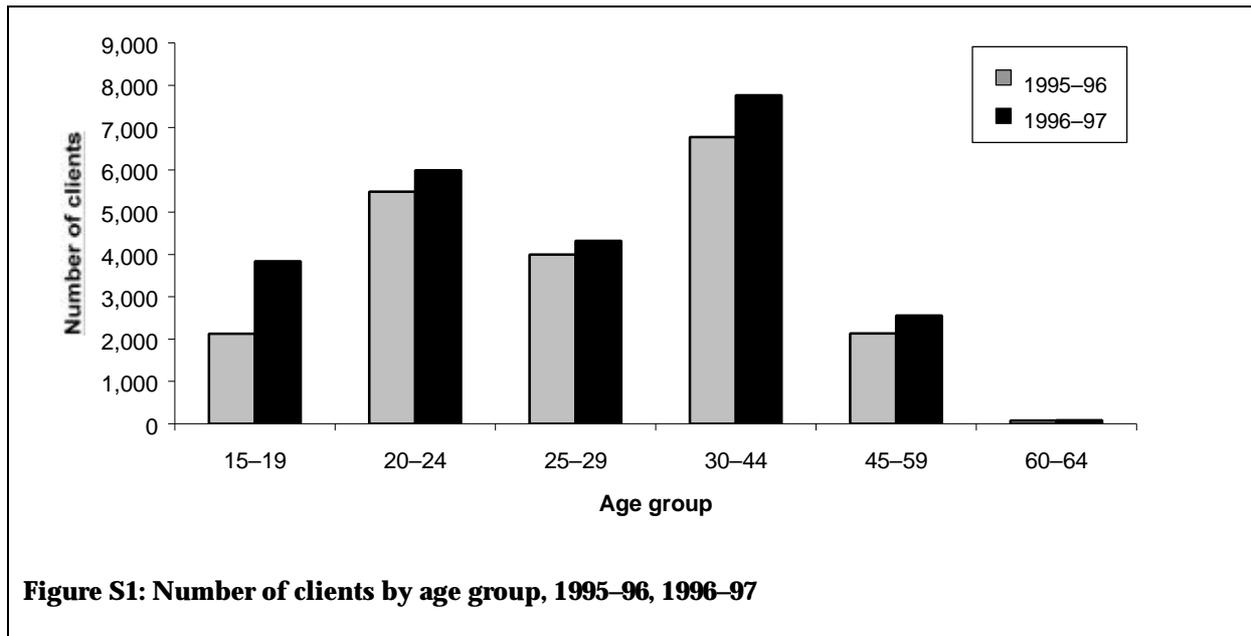
Note: Location is classified according to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services Rural and Remote Areas classification.

The average number of clients per site increased from 86 in 1995–96 to 92 in 1996–97. The percentage of sites having over 100 clients also increased markedly from 16% in 1995–96 to 37% in 1996–97. The average number of staff per site fell marginally from 6.6 in 1995–96 to 6.5 in 1996–97.

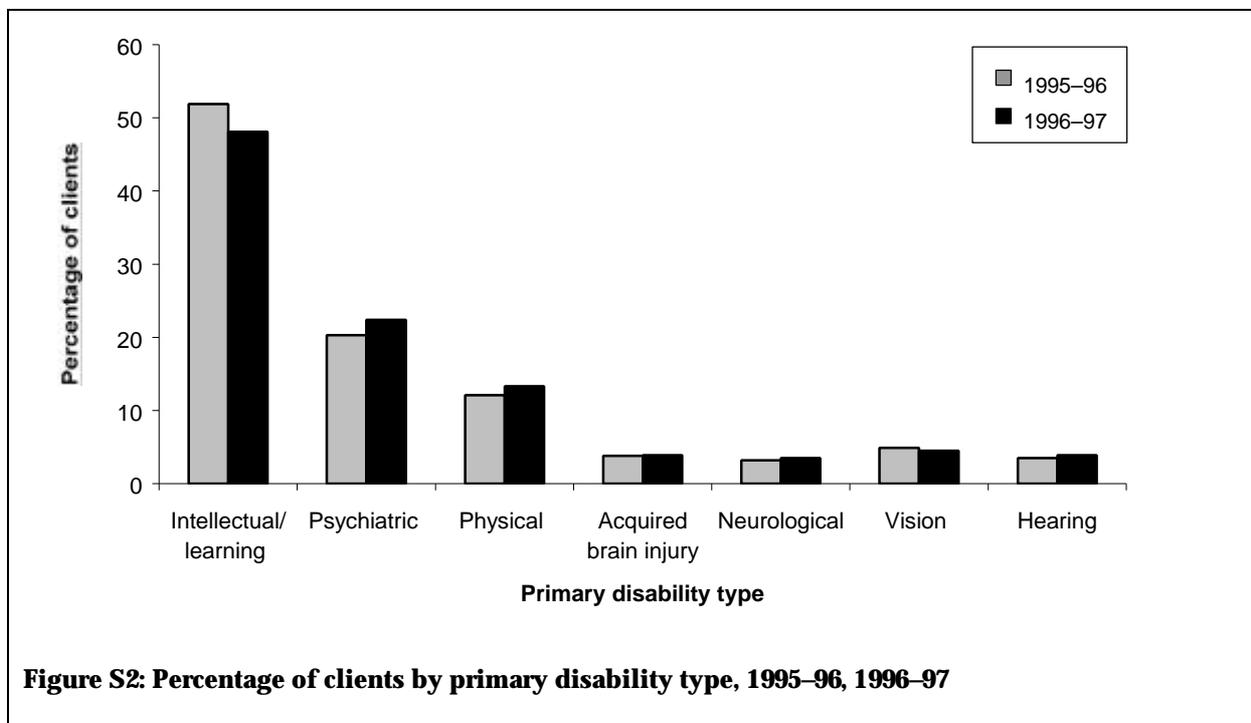
## Clients

A total of 20,624 clients were recorded as having received some support from a service between 1 July 1995 and 30 June 1996, and 24,590 clients between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997.

Almost two-thirds of all clients were male (64% in 1995–96 and 63% in 1996–97). The age of clients ranged from 15 years to 64 years, with 89% being aged 44 years or less in both periods. The number of clients grew in each age group between 1995–96 and 1996–97, the largest relative growth being in the 15–19 year age group (Figure S1). Approximately 2% of clients were identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, which is similar to their representation in the general Australian population.

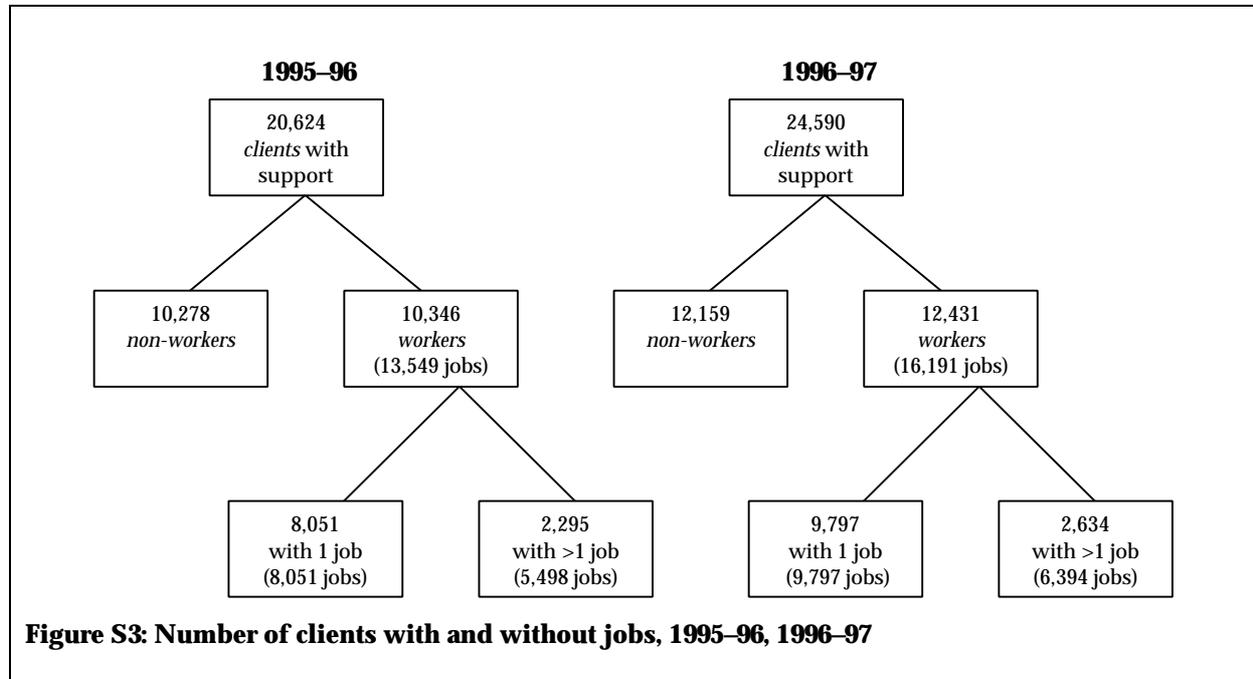


In 1996-97, almost half (48%) of people attending open employment services had intellectual/learning as their primary disability, followed by about a fifth (22%) who had a psychiatric disability and 13% who had a physical disability (Figure S2). This percentage distribution differs from that in 1995-96, where a higher percentage of people had intellectual/learning as their primary disability type (52%) and correspondingly lower percentages of people had psychiatric (20%) or physical disabilities (12%) as their primary disability.



## Job characteristics

**Chapter 4** details the characteristics of client jobs in 1995–96 and 1996–97. Of the 24,590 clients receiving support in 1996–97, 12,431 (51%) had at least one job in this period ('workers'). Of these 'workers', 9,797 or 79% had only one job and 2,634 or 21% had two or more jobs— similar proportions to those in 1995–96 (Figure S3). A total of 16,191 jobs were undertaken by workers during 1996–97.



In both 1995–96 and 1996–97, jobs were spread across all industry sectors, with the leading employers being in manufacturing (15% each year) and retail trade (13% and 14% respectively), followed by health and community services (9% each year). In both periods, the majority of all jobs were as labourers/related workers, with clerks and sales/personal staff as the other main occupational categories.

The median length of a job current at the end of 1995–96 was 44 weeks and at the end of 1996–97 was 48 weeks. The percentage of current jobs of 12 months or less duration declined between 1995–96 and 1996–97 and the percentage of jobs of 24 months or more duration increased. About two-thirds of jobs were on a permanent regular basis (63% in 1995–96 and 64% in 1996–97).

## Client job experience

**Chapter 5** presents a more detailed analysis of the experience of workers (Table S3).

Of all workers in 1996–97, 47% had a job at both the beginning and end of the period (termed 'job retained'), and 29% gained a job during the period and remained in employment at the end of the period ('job gained and retained'). A further 11% were employed at the beginning of the period but not at the end ('job lost'), and the remaining 12% had work at some time during the period but started and finished the period unemployed ('job gained and lost'). Compared with 1995–96, 1996–97 saw a higher

percentage of workers in the 'job retained' category (47%), with relatively lower percentages in the other categories, particularly 'job gained and lost' (12%).

**Table S3: Job history of workers during 1995–96, 1996–97**

Job history	Number	%
<b>1995–96</b>		
Job retained	4,485	43.4
Job lost	1,235	11.9
Job gained and retained	3,060	29.6
Job gained and lost	1,566	15.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,346</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>1996–97</b>		
Job retained	5,894	47.4
Job lost	1,415	11.4
Job gained and retained	3,585	28.8
Job gained and lost	1,537	12.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,431</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As at 1 July 1996, 7,309 clients had a job and this increased by 2,170 or 30% to 9,479 by 30 June 1997. The proportional increase from 1 July 1995 to 30 June 1996 was similar at 32%.

In order to analyse different aspects of a person's job experience, three sets of measures were calculated. These were:

- time in work (in weeks, per time in support, hours per work week, hours per week);
- mean wage (wage per hour, wage per work week, mean income per support week); and
- number of weeks to obtain a job.

In 1996–97 the average worker was in work for about 33 weeks, which equated to just under three-quarters (73%) of their time in support. This was a slight increase over 1995–96 (31 weeks or 70%), however the mean hours of work per working week fell from 25.5 to 24.8 between the periods. The latter trend almost compensated for the former, so that the mean hours of work per week in support increased slightly from 18.3 to 18.6. This figure is a reflection of the total hours of work per working client for the whole year (that is, the amount of work averaged over all of the time in support).

From 1995–96 to 1996–97 the mean hourly wage rate increased by 2.7% from \$9.16 to \$9.41. However, because of the decrease of similar magnitude in the mean hours of work per working week, the mean weekly wage remained at \$229. At the same time, the mean income per week of support increased from \$164 to \$170, reflecting an increase in mean income per year of 3.8% from \$7,344 to \$7,624. The average time taken to get a job (for those clients who obtained work after the beginning of the financial year) was 14.7 weeks in 1995–96 and 14.0 weeks in 1996–97.

Nearly all client characteristics studied (such as sex, primary disability type and living arrangements) appeared to be related to one or more of the measures of job experience in some way. Details are provided in Chapter 5.

## Client support

**Chapter 6** provides a detailed analysis of the support provided by agencies to clients, and the factors relating to it.

Support can be categorised as:

- support given directly to a client; and
- other support including general administration, general job search and travel.

The analysis in Chapter 6 focuses on direct support, because the recording of the ‘other’ category is optional in the data system. Of the recorded support times, approximately three-fifths of support hours go directly to the client.

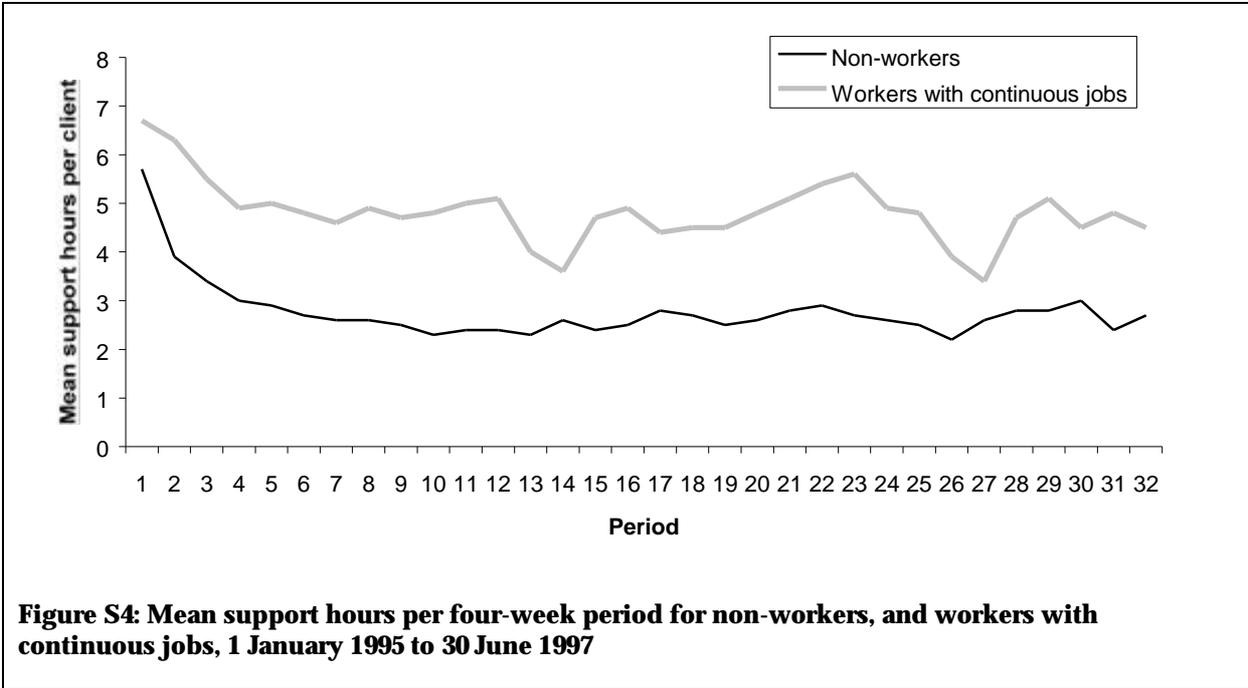
People with an intellectual/learning disability received 62% of all direct support hours in 1996–97, down slightly from 66% in 1995–96. These clients also had the highest mean support per client. The next two largest groups were clients with a psychiatric disability who received 13% of direct support in 1996–97, and clients with a physical disability who received 11%.

Clients who had jobs (workers) received more support than other clients (non-workers) in both periods (2.0 versus 1.0 hours per week in 1996–97).

The amount of support received also varied with the length of time a client had been receiving support and the relationship of the support received to their job history. To analyse this further, the whole 30 months of NIMS data from 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 has been used.

For workers who had one job continuously for the whole support period there was a small peak in support at the beginning of the period, after which support levelled out but with some seasonal variation.

For non-workers with ongoing support, the mean support peaked in the first four-week period and rapidly dropped over the next twenty-week period before declining and levelling out (Figure S4).



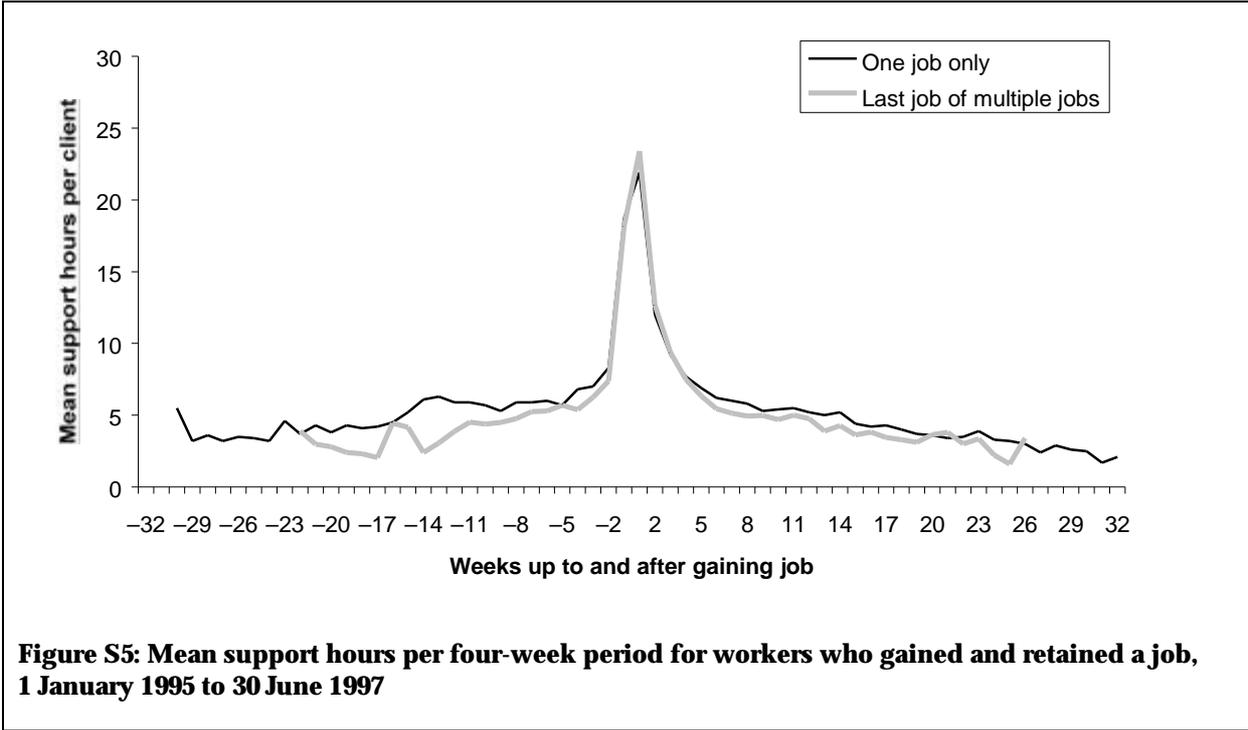
**Figure S4: Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, and workers with continuous jobs, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997**

The pattern of support for *other workers* varied with time, but this variation depended on their job history. For workers who gained a job there was a gradual increase in support during the pre-job phase followed by very large peaks of support just before and after

gaining a job. If the job was retained, mean support gradually declined to well under one hour per week (that is, less than four hours per four-week period), much less than the overall worker average and also less than for those who retained one job throughout the period (Figure S5).

The amount of support given at the time of obtaining a job that is retained does not appear to substantially depend on whether the client had a previous job or not (Figure S5).

Workers who lost a job had a small peak in support around the time of job loss, after which support declined to very low levels.



The support received by clients varied according to a number of characteristics such as sex, age, primary disability type, preferred spoken language, frequency of assistance required by clients for activities of daily living (one or more of self-care, mobility and verbal communication) and client type. For workers, differences were generally most apparent at the time of peak support when gaining a job.

