



5.9 Health of Australians with disability

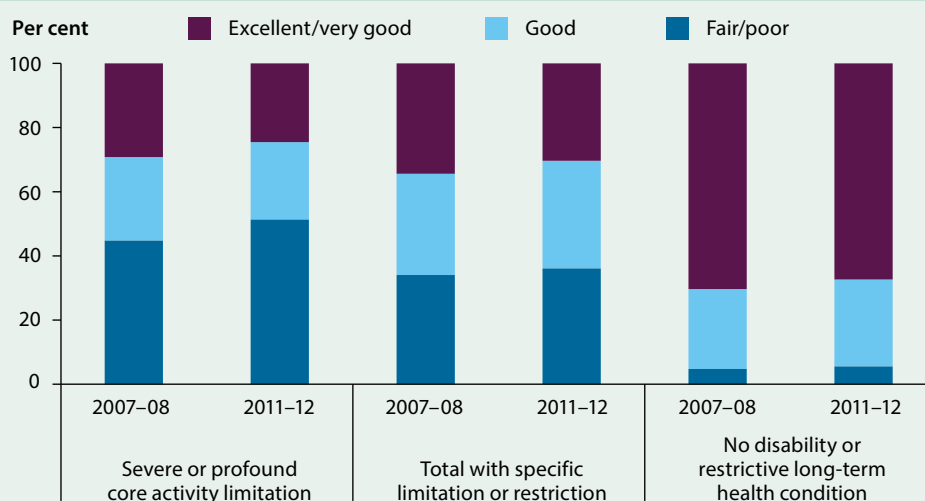
One of six priority outcomes of the National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 is 'People with disability attain the highest possible health and wellbeing outcomes throughout their lives' (DSS 2012). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) short disability module was first included in the ABS 2007–08 National Health Survey (NHS) and again in the 2011–12 NHS collection. This snapshot focuses on people aged under 65 years, as disability prevalence among older people is under-reported in the NHS due to the exclusion of institutional care settings.

Disability and self-assessment of health

Due to a range of factors—some of which may be directly related to a person's disability—people with disability, as a group, experience significantly poorer health than those without disability.

Based on survey data, in 2011–12, half (51%) of people aged 15–64 with severe or profound core activity limitation (that is, 'sometimes or always needing help with activities of self-care, mobility or communication') self-assessed their health as 'poor' or 'fair', compared with 5.6% for people without disability. The gap in self-assessed health between the two population groups remained large between 2007–08 and 2011–12 (Figure 5.9.1).

Figure 5.9.1: Self-assessed health status, people aged 15–64, by disability status, 2007–08 and 2011–12



Note: Percentages have been age-standardised to the Australian population as at 30 June 2001.

Sources: AIHW analysis of ABS 2007–08 and 2011–12 National Health Survey confidentialised unit record files.



Long-term health conditions

In 2011–12, people aged under 65 with severe or profound core activity limitation had a higher prevalence of various types of long-term health conditions and were 3.3 times as likely as people without disability to have three or more long-term health conditions (74% versus 23%).

- Half (50%) of people aged under 65 with severe or profound core activity limitation had mental health conditions, compared with 7.7% of people without disability.
- One in 5 (21%) people aged under 65 with severe or profound core activity limitation had arthritis—3.9 times the rate for people without disability (5.3%).
- Other conditions more commonly reported by people with severe or profound core activity limitation were back problems (27%), deafness (22%), cardiovascular diseases (18%), asthma (18%) and migraine (16%).

Health risk factors and behaviours

In 2011–12, a higher proportion of adults aged 18–64 with severe or profound activity limitation were overweight or obese, compared with people without disability (70% versus 60%). People with severe or profound core activity limitation were 1.7 times as likely as those without disability to be obese (43% versus 25%).

Almost half (46%) of people aged 15–64 with severe or profound disability did no exercise, compared with 31% of people without disability. Between 2007–08 and 2011–12, the difference in the proportions doing no exercise increased by 6 percentage points.

People aged 15–64 with severe or profound disability were twice as likely as those without disability to be current daily smokers (31% versus 15%) and 1.8 times as likely to start daily smoking before the age of 18 (41% versus 23%).

Adults aged 18–64 with severe or profound core activity limitation were 18 times as likely as those without disability to have a very high level of psychological distress (22% versus 1.2%).

What is missing from the picture?

As discussed earlier, because the NHS excludes institutional care settings and therefore underestimates disability prevalence among older people, the associated analysis of health status and risks of people with disability is limited to younger people. Similarly, the experiences of older people (with and without disability) in their encounters with the health care system are restricted to people living in the community (see 'Chapter 6.17 Health care use by older Australians').

There is also limited information on the relationship between health status and other priority outcomes of the National Disability Strategy, such as employment and social participation.

Where do I go for more information?

The report [Health status and risk factors of Australians with disability 2007–08 and 2011–12](#) is available for free download on the AIHW website. More information on the health of Australians with disability based on analysis of national population survey data is available for free download on the AIHW website: [Health of Australians with disability: health status and risk factors](#), [The use of health services among Australians with disability](#), and [Access to health services by Australians with disability 2012](#).

Reference

DSS (Department of Social Services) 2012. National Disability Strategy 2010–2020. Canberra: DSS.