

Open employment services for people with disabilities 1995: the first year of NIMS data

**Phil Anderson
Kim Wisener**

1996

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The NIMS system is funded and supported by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services. Departmental staff have had a longstanding role in ensuring the smooth operation of the system, and have provided considerable feedback and ideas. This role included chairing the Steering Committee which coordinated the implementation of the NIMS system.

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Summary

This report presents data on open employment services and their clients funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, in 1995.

Data were collected via a new system—the National Information Management System (NIMS) for open employment services. The design of the system originated with service providers wishing to improve and share management information and to collate national data. Front-end software captures data for local use and transmission for central collation. The development and implementation of the system were financially supported by the Department. The Institute 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, outlining the origin and purpose of open employment services and the population that they serve.

In 1993, according to a major ABS survey of disability in Australia, there were an estimated 368,300 people in Australia, aged from 5 to 64 years, who had a 'severe or profound handicap', meaning that they needed regular or occasional support with activities of daily living—self-care, mobility or verbal communication. It is argued that this is a relevant estimate of the broad target population for disability support services—under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement these services are targeted towards people with ongoing support needs. At present there is not a definition of the target group, nor of 'severity' of disability, which readily enables population data to be compared with service data, or which rates the complexity of needs of service clients.

People with a handicap (not necessarily severe) had much higher rates of unemployment than the rest of the population; in the 1993 ABS survey, some 21.0% of people with a handicap were unemployed, compared with an estimate of 12.7% in that survey 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 business services providing supported employment. In an **open employment service**, clients receive support from a service outlet but are directly employed by another organisation not funded under the Act. Open employment services include Competitive Employment Training and Placement (CETP) services, Individual Supported Job (ISJ) services and some enclave services. The other group of employment services are **business services** providing supported employment; clients of these services are employed by the same organisation that provides the employment support.

This report covers the activities of the open employment services (CETP, ISJ and some enclave services). Limited data and research have been available to date on these services and their clients in Australia.

Service providers

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

At the end of 1995 there were 244 open employment sites using the NIMS system of which 228 had provided data for 1995. All States and Territories had open employment sites, with three-quarters of them being 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

State	Number	Per cent
New South Wales	71	31.1
Victoria	56	24.6
Queensland	54	23.7
Western Australia	28	12.3
South Australia	7	3.1
Tasmania	4	1.8
Australian Capital Territory	5	2.2
Northern Territory	3	1.3
Total	228	100.0

Note: The number of sites equals the number of NIMS software systems installed.

Table S2: Number of sites by rural/remote classification, 1995

Classification	Number	Per cent
Urban	150	65.8
Rural	69	30.3
Remote	9	3.9
Total	228	100.0

Client numbers for 1995 ranged from 5 to 310 per site with an average of 82. Most (83%) sites had between 1 and 10 staff with the average being 5 paid support staff and 1 administration staff.

Clients

A total of 18,527 clients were recorded as having received some support during 1995. Of these, 70% were receiving a CETP service, and 25% an ISJ service.

Almost two-thirds (64%) of these 18,527 clients were male (Figure S1). The age of clients ranged from 15 years to 64 years with 91% being aged 44 years or less. Approximately 2% of clients were identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which is similar to their representation in the general Australian population.

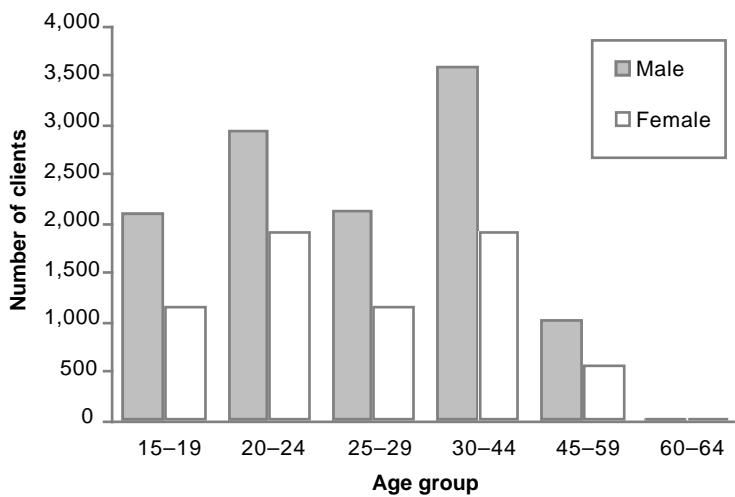


Figure S1: Number of clients by sex and age, 1995

All disability types were represented among clients (Table S3). Over half (55%) of clients had intellectual/learning as their primary disability type, followed by psychiatric (17.5%) and physical (12%). Nearly one-quarter (23%) of clients had another significant disability in addition to their primary disability.

Table S3: Number of clients receiving support by primary disability, 1995

Primary disability type	Number	Per cent
Acquired brain injury	652	3.5
Deaf and blind	20	0.1
Hearing	669	3.6
Intellectual / learning	10,164	54.9
Neurological	620	3.3
Physical	2,232	12.0
Psychiatric	3,233	17.5
Speech	63	0.3
Vision	862	4.7
Not known	12	0.1
Total	18,527	100.0

At the end of 1995 about 60% (11,089) of clients had been through the disability panel process with 11% referred by the panel, 49% endorsed and less than 1% rejected. Disability panels comprise representatives of three Commonwealth departments—Social Security; Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs; and Health and Family Services. The panels were established in 1991 to assess and refer people with a disability to appropriate rehabilitation, training, education, or employment services, and to coordinate delivery of services.

Client jobs

The number of clients who had a job during 1995 ('workers') was 8,924 or 48% of all clients (Figure S2). The total number of jobs was 11,529 with 21% of workers having had more than one job.

Jobs undertaken by clients were spread across all industry types, with those in manufacturing (16%) and retail (13%) being the most common. The majority of jobs were as labourer/workers (65%) followed by clerks (12%) and sales/personal services workers (11%). The average length of a job at the end of 1995 was 74 weeks (Table S4). About two-thirds (64%) of jobs were on a permanent regular basis.

Table S4: Duration of jobs current as at the end of 1995

Job duration	Number	Per cent
<3 months	1,358	18.3
3–6 months	1,294	17.4
6–9 months	886	11.9
9–12 months	903	12.1
12–18 months	896	12.1
18–24 months	649	8.7
24–36 months	599	8.1
>36 months	849	11.5
Missing	3	0.0
Total	7,437	100.0

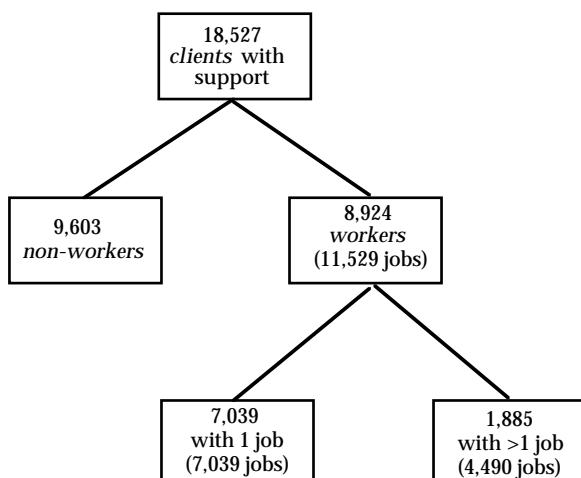


Figure S2: Number of clients with and without jobs, 1995

Client job experience

Chapter 4 presents a more detailed analysis of the experience of these workers (Table S5).

Of all workers, 45% had a job at both the beginning and end of 1995 (termed ‘job retained’), and 34% gained a job during 1995 and remained in employment at the end of the year (‘job gained and retained’). A further 8% were employed at the beginning of the year but not at the end (‘job lost’), and the remaining 13% had work at some time during the year but started and finished the year unemployed (‘job gained and lost’).

Table S5: Job history of workers during 1995

Job history	With one job during 1995		With more than one job during 1995		All workers	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Job retained	3,174	35.6	846	9.5	4,020	45.1
Job lost	546	6.1	170	1.9	716	8.0
Job gained and retained	2,346	26.3	661	7.4	3,007	33.7
Job gained and lost	973	10.9	208	2.3	1,181	13.2
Total	7,039	78.9	1,885	21.1	8,924	100.0

The overall net gain in the number of workers was 48% (2,291) over the year (1995).

In order to analyse different aspects of a person’s job experience, four 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)
- number of jobs per worker
- number of weeks to obtain a job.

Among workers, the average time worked per week was 26.1 hours and the average hourly and weekly rates of pay were \$8.97 and \$229. On average, workers spent about three-quarters (72.7%) of the year with a job (or of their period in support, if less than a year). Their average income per support week was \$168.

In order to explore the inter-relationships among these measures of job experience and other key factors describing the clients or the agencies, multivariate analyses were carried out. The purpose of such analyses is to isolate the effect of each factor, allowing for the effects which other influential factors may have.

Client factors which appeared to be related to one or more of these measures of job experience include: sex, age, Indigenous status, primary disability type, presence of another disability, living arrangements, and need for continual assistance with activities of daily living (ADL assistance).

Women with a disability were less likely to have had a job, and those who had a job on average earned less income from work than men with a disability, largely because they worked fewer hours per week. The likelihood of employment was lowest for 15 to 19 year-olds, and increased with age. Workers in the 25 to 29 age group had the highest earnings from jobs.

People identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or South Sea Islander were less likely to have had a job than other clients. However, for workers, there were no statistically significant differences by Indigenous status in wages or hours worked. Non-English-speaking background did not appear to be a factor related to job experience.

Clients with an intellectual/learning disability were more likely to have had a job than those with a physical, neurological or psychiatric disability, or an acquired brain injury; however, their average rate of pay per hour was the lowest of all groups. Despite having

above-average hourly rates of pay, workers with a psychiatric disability had the lowest mean income from jobs, because on average they worked fewer hours per week.

Clients with more than one disability were less likely to have had a job than clients with one disability only, and those who were employed tended to earn less income from jobs.

There is not a widely accepted overall ‘summary’ measure of severity of disability. However, other factors, such as living arrangements and the frequency of ADL assistance required, which may be surrogates for such a severity measure, were statistically significant in their relationship to job experience. People who lived alone or with family were more likely to have been employed, and if employed to have a greater income from work, than people with other living arrangements.

The likelihood of getting a job increased with decreasing agency site client-to-staff ratio. People who required continual assistance with activities of daily living had a similar rate of employment to other clients; however, this appeared to be because they were more likely to be supported by an agency site with a low client-to-staff ratio, and thus overall received more hours of support than average. The average income from work for these clients was less than that for other clients.

Clients with endorsement by a disability panel were more likely to get a job than clients who were referred, rejected or not considered by a panel. However, workers who had been rejected by a panel had the highest average income from work.

There was a complex association between funding type and job experience. After controlling for other factors, the chance of an ISJ client getting a job is similar to that for a CETP client, but subsequent job experience is not as favourable.

Job experience varied considerably with State and Territory, even after controlling for other factors. The Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory had the highest rates of clients with jobs, and along with South Australia the highest average income for workers. Of the four largest States, Western Australia had the highest employment rate and New South Wales the highest mean income from work.

Agencies in remote areas had a higher percentage of clients with a job, but these jobs were much more likely to be casual or temporary employment. Workers in urban areas tended to have higher rates of pay and to earn more income from jobs over the year.

The interrelationships among all these factors are complex. The multivariate analysis demonstrates that there appear to be many factors influencing people’s job experience. This indicates that there is not likely to be a simple predictive model of factors leading to successful job experience.

Client support

Chapter 5 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 5 focuses on the former, because the recording of the ‘other’ category is optional in the data system. Of the recorded support times, approximately two-thirds of support hours go directly to the client.

About two-thirds (68%) of all direct support hours were given to people with an intellectual/learning disability, who were the largest group and also had the highest mean support per client. Clients with a psychiatric disability received 11% of total direct support and clients with a physical disability received 9%.

People who had jobs (workers) received more support than other clients (2.3 vs 0.9 hours per week). For non-workers, the amount of support received declined with the length of

time they were receiving support (Figure S3). This also occurred during the subsequent unemployed period of clients who had a job or jobs which finished in 1995.

For workers, the pattern of support varied with time, but this variation depended on their job history. There were peaks of support around the time of job gain (Figure S4). Workers who had only one job which was retained, or gained and retained, during 1995 received levels of support which tended to decline the longer they stayed with the job. In contrast, workers who had only one job which ended during 1995 received higher and more consistent levels of support during the period they were in work.

Workers who had more than one job also tended to have higher levels of support than those who had only one job (Figure S4).

The support received by clients did not vary significantly with sex or Indigenous status. For clients without a job, those from a non-English-speaking background tended to receive slightly more support than others, but this was not true for workers.

Support received did vary with age for both workers and non-workers (Table S6). The 15 to 19 age group received the highest level of support, and there was a general decline in support with older age groups.

Without controlling for other factors, on average clients with an intellectual/learning disability or an acquired brain injury received more support than those with a neurological, psychiatric or physical disability. However, after controlling for other factors, clients with a psychiatric disability had the highest mean level of support. This result appeared to be related to the fact that these clients were older than average, less likely to be a client of a site with a low client-to-staff ratio and, to a lesser extent, less likely to require frequent or continuous ADL assistance for activities of daily living. This means that, overall, clients with a psychiatric disability received considerably less support than clients with an intellectual/learning disability; however, a worker with a psychiatric disability received, on average, more support than a worker of the same age with an intellectual/learning disability needing the same frequency of ADL assistance and supported by a site with a similar client-to-staff ratio.

Workers with more than one disability received a higher level of support than other workers, but this was not so for non-workers. Both workers and non-workers who needed frequent or continual ADL assistance received more support.

Clients referred or endorsed by a disability panel received more support than other clients, particularly if they had a job. ISJ workers received more support than CETP workers.

Levels of support per client varied from State to State. Working clients of remote agencies received more support than other workers, possibly related to their pattern of working in more jobs, and in jobs more of a casual nature. However, non-working clients received much less support in rural and remote areas than in urban areas. As might be expected, lower client-to-staff ratios were strongly associated with higher levels of support per client.

As with job experience, there were many factors influencing the level of support received.

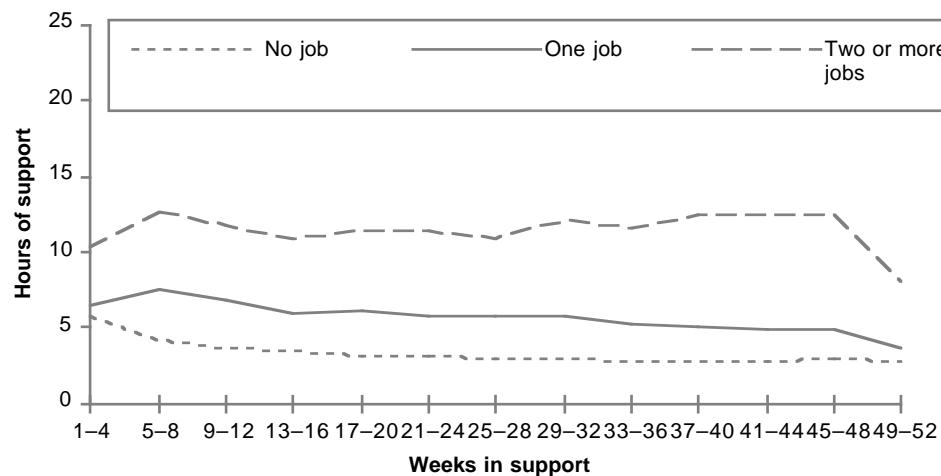


Figure S3: Mean hours of support per four-week period for (1) clients without a job , and (2) clients with a job at the start and a job at the end of 1995 ('job retained')

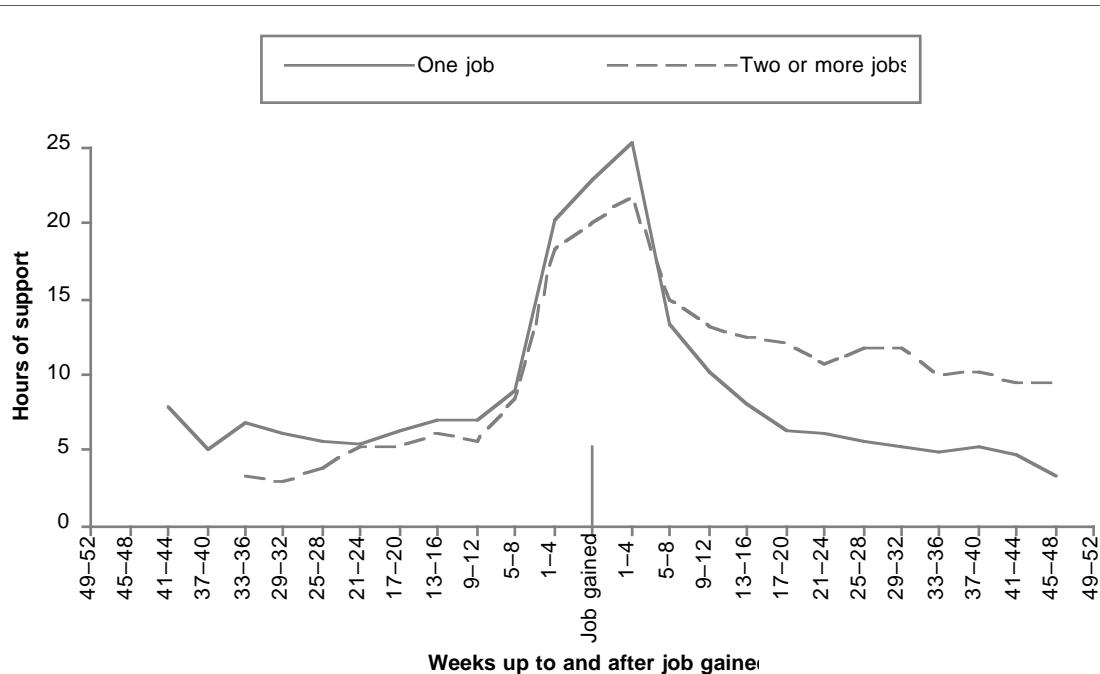


Figure S4: Mean hours of support per four-week period for clients who gained and kept a job during 1995

Table S6: Mean hours of support per week per client for workers and non-workers, by primary disability type, frequency of ADL assistance required^(a), age group, presence of other disability and funding type, 1995

	Non-workers	Workers		Non-workers	Workers
Primary disability			Age group		
Intellectual/learning	1.0	2.7	15–19	1.1	2.8
Physical	0.8	1.7	20–24	1.0	2.5
Acquired brain injury	1.2	2.5	25–29	0.9	2.2
Deaf and blind	0.4	2.2	30–44	0.8	2.0
Vision	0.8	1.0	45–59	0.7	1.7
Hearing	0.8	1.3	60–64	0.8	1.7
Speech	1.5	1.3	65–69	0.3	0.8
Psychiatric	0.8	1.7			
Neurological	0.8	2.1	Other disability		
			Yes	1.0	2.7
Frequency of ADL assistance required			No	0.9	2.1
Not at all	0.8	1.7			
Occasionally	0.8	1.8	Funding type		
Frequently	1.1	2.9	CETP	0.8	1.8
Continually	1.5	4.2	ISJ	1.3	3.5

(a) Frequency of assistance required in the areas of daily living, i.e. self-care, mobility and/or verbal communication (called 'level of support required' in the NIMS data dictionary).

Interstate comparisons

Chapter 6 compares key statistical data, tabulated on a State by State basis.

A number of agency site and client characteristics varied from State to State:

- size of agency site
- sex and age distributions of clients
- disability types of clients
- presence of another disability
- frequency of assistance required for activities of daily living
- non-English-speaking background and Indigenous origin
- funding type
- employment basis
- industry and occupation of client jobs.

As discussed above, most of these characteristics were associated with both variation in client job experience and in the amount of open employment support received. Therefore, it was not surprising that job experience, wages and support also varied among States. However, multivariate analyses showed that there was statistically significant interstate variation in job experience and support even allowing for other factors. This suggests that there are characteristics of States not included in the NIMS system (e.g. economic indicators) and that these characteristics are associated with both job experience and the support provided by agencies to clients.

