

# 1 Introduction: Employment and people with disabilities

This report presents national data on open employment services for people with disabilities and on the clients of these services in 1997–98. The data were collected via the National Information Management System for open employment services (NIMS). The aim of the report is to provide useful information to:

- the open employment outlets that supply NIMS data;
- the clients of these open employment outlets;
- the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services; and
- other individuals or organisations interested in data about employment services for people with disabilities.

Chapter 1 provides information about disability in the Australian population and labour force, a brief outline of the nature of open employment services in Australia, and a description of the NIMS data system and its development.

Subsequent chapters discuss the 1997–98 NIMS data from a number of perspectives:

- Chapter 2 focuses on service providers.
- Chapter 3 presents client characteristics.
- Chapter 4 describes client job profiles, using each job as the basic unit for analysis.
- Chapter 5 analyses information about the job experience of workers, using individual workers as the basic unit for analysis.
- Chapter 6 discusses client support.

Data from the NIMS collection are released by the AIHW on a quarterly basis in the form of NIMS Data Briefings. Two comprehensive reports have also been released by the AIHW to date, *Open Employment Services for People with Disabilities 1995: The First Year of NIMS Data* and *Open Employment Services for People with Disabilities 1995-96 and 1996-97* (Anderson & Wisener 1997; Anderson & Golley 1998). These sources provide further background to the contents of this report and will be referred to throughout this publication where appropriate.

# 1.1 Disability in Australia

## Population data

In the 1998 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, a person has a disability if they have a limitation, restriction or impairment which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and which restricts everyday activities (ABS 1998a: 67). The specific restrictions that a person with a disability may experience are defined as being either core activity restrictions (relating to the core activities of self-care, mobility or communication), or schooling or employment restrictions.

According to the ABS, core activity restrictions (in the areas of self-care, mobility or communication) may be mild, moderate, severe or profound. People who have a mild activity restriction have no difficulty performing a core activity but use aids or equipment as a result of the disability. People who have a moderate activity restriction do not require assistance but have difficulty performing a core activity. People who have a severe activity restriction sometimes need assistance to perform a core activity, and people with a profound activity restriction may be unable to perform a core activity or always need assistance to perform a core activity (ABS 1998a:4). People with severe or profound activity limitations and those with schooling and employment restrictions are thus the major target population group for a range of support services.

The ABS estimated that there were 3,610,300 people with a disability in Australia in 1998 (19.3% of the total population), of whom 3,155,900 people experienced specific restrictions with core activities or with schooling or employment (16.9% of the total population; Table 1.1 and ABS 1998a:4). It was estimated that about 510,000 people aged 15 to 64 (4.1% of the population of that age) experienced severe or profound activity restrictions. About 1,474,600 people aged 15 to 64 experienced schooling or employment restrictions, the vast majority (80.9%) of these people also experiencing core activity restrictions in activities of daily living. This provides an idea of the size of the population that may be potentially eligible for employment and other services.

**Table 1.1: People with an activity restriction: severity of activity restriction by sex and age as a percentage of the Australian population of that sex and age, Australia, 1998**

|                     | Profound core activity restriction | Severe core activity restriction | Moderate core activity restriction | Mild core activity restriction | Schooling or employment only | Total          | Total ('000)    |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <b>Males</b>        |                                    |                                  |                                    |                                |                              |                |                 |
| 0-4                 | *1.3                               | 1.7                              | **0.3                              | ..                             | ..                           | 3.3            | 659.7           |
| 5-14                | 3.0                                | 2.8                              | 0.8                                | 2.2                            | 2.0                          | 10.8           | 1,346.2         |
| 15-24               | 0.7                                | 1.4                              | 1.1                                | 2.5                            | 2.1                          | 7.8            | 1,364.4         |
| 25-34               | 1.1                                | 1.4                              | 1.5                                | 3.5                            | 1.9                          | 9.3            | 1,438.4         |
| 35-44               | 0.9                                | 2.2                              | 3.1                                | 4.1                            | 3.0                          | 13.3           | 1,437.5         |
| 45-54               | 0.9                                | 4.6                              | 5.6                                | 5.7                            | 2.8                          | 19.6           | 1,234.9         |
| 55-59               | 2.4                                | 6.4                              | 6.9                                | 9.9                            | 3.3                          | 28.8           | 442.2           |
| 60-64               | 2.8                                | 5.5                              | 9.4                                | 14.4                           | 3.6                          | 35.7           | 365.8           |
| 65+                 | 10.0                               | 6.3                              | 11.2                               | 19.5                           | ..                           | 47.0           | 993.2           |
| 15-64               | 1.1                                | 2.8                              | 3.4                                | 4.9                            | 2.6                          | 14.8           | 6,283.2         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>2.4</b>                         | <b>3.1</b>                       | <b>3.6</b>                         | <b>5.8</b>                     | <b>2.0</b>                   | <b>16.9</b>    |                 |
| <b>Total ('000)</b> | <b>218.8</b>                       | <b>286.6</b>                     | <b>338.6</b>                       | <b>534.3</b>                   | <b>188.4</b>                 | <b>1,566.7</b> | <b>9,282.3</b>  |
| <b>Females</b>      |                                    |                                  |                                    |                                |                              |                |                 |
| 0-4                 | *0.9                               | **0.3                            | **0.3                              | ..                             | ..                           | 1.6            | 625.1           |
| 5-14                | 1.7                                | 1.4                              | *0.4                               | 0.9                            | 1.5                          | 5.9            | 1,281.3         |
| 15-24               | 0.9                                | 0.9                              | *0.6                               | 2.3                            | 1.3                          | 5.9            | 1,305.4         |
| 25-34               | 0.6                                | 1.9                              | 1.4                                | 2.7                            | 1.9                          | 8.5            | 1,438.9         |
| 35-44               | 0.9                                | 3.0                              | 3.1                                | 3.9                            | 2.3                          | 13.2           | 1,445.5         |
| 45-54               | 1.6                                | 5.1                              | 4.9                                | 5.8                            | 2.2                          | 19.5           | 1,208.1         |
| 55-59               | 1.7                                | 6.3                              | 8.2                                | 10.0                           | 2.9                          | 29.1           | 428.0           |
| 60-64               | 3.2                                | 6.1                              | 9.0                                | 11.4                           | 1.4                          | 31.0           | 367.9           |
| 65+                 | 17.2                               | 7.8                              | 9.0                                | 16.1                           | —                            | 50.1           | 1,278.0         |
| 15-64               | 1.2                                | 3.1                              | 3.2                                | 4.5                            | 1.9                          | 13.9           | 6,193.8         |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>3.4</b>                         | <b>3.3</b>                       | <b>3.4</b>                         | <b>5.3</b>                     | <b>1.5</b>                   | <b>16.9</b>    |                 |
| <b>Total ('000)</b> | <b>318.9</b>                       | <b>311.6</b>                     | <b>321.7</b>                       | <b>497.5</b>                   | <b>139.5</b>                 | <b>1,589.2</b> | <b>9,378.2</b>  |
| <b>Persons</b>      |                                    |                                  |                                    |                                |                              |                |                 |
| 0-4                 | 1.1                                | 1.1                              | *0.3                               | ..                             | ..                           | 2.5            | 1,284.8         |
| 5-14                | 2.3                                | 2.1                              | 0.6                                | 1.6                            | 1.8                          | 8.4            | 2,627.5         |
| 15-24               | 0.8                                | 1.1                              | 0.8                                | 2.4                            | 1.7                          | 6.9            | 2,669.8         |
| 25-34               | 0.8                                | 1.6                              | 1.4                                | 3.1                            | 1.9                          | 8.9            | 2,877.4         |
| 35-44               | 0.9                                | 2.6                              | 3.1                                | 4.0                            | 2.6                          | 13.3           | 2,883.0         |
| 45-54               | 1.3                                | 4.8                              | 5.2                                | 5.7                            | 2.5                          | 19.6           | 2,443.0         |
| 55-59               | 2.0                                | 6.3                              | 7.6                                | 10.0                           | 3.0                          | 28.9           | 870.2           |
| 60-64               | 3.0                                | 5.8                              | 9.2                                | 12.9                           | 2.5                          | 33.4           | 733.7           |
| 65+                 | 14.1                               | 7.1                              | 10.0                               | 17.6                           | ..                           | 48.8           | 2,271.3         |
| 15-64               | 1.1                                | 3.0                              | 3.3                                | 4.7                            | 2.3                          | 14.4           | 12,477.1        |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>2.9</b>                         | <b>3.2</b>                       | <b>3.5</b>                         | <b>5.5</b>                     | <b>1.8</b>                   | <b>16.9</b>    |                 |
| <b>Total ('000)</b> | <b>537.7</b>                       | <b>598.2</b>                     | <b>660.3</b>                       | <b>1,031.8</b>                 | <b>327.9</b>                 | <b>3,155.9</b> | <b>18,660.6</b> |

*Notes:*

1. Core activities comprise communication, mobility and self-care.
2. Percentages marked with an asterisk (\*) have been calculated from population estimates with relative standard errors (RSEs) between 25% and 50% and should be treated with caution. Percentages marked with a double asterisk (\*\*) have been calculated from estimates with RSEs greater than 50% and are considered too unreliable for general use.

Source: ABS 1998a:14.

Table 1.2 presents data on the labour force status of working age people with a disability living in households. Employment status and labour force participation were both strongly related to the presence of disability and specific activity restriction. In 1998 people with specific activity restrictions were less likely to participate in the labour force (49%) than all people with a disability (53%) or all people in the population (76%). People with specific activity restrictions or a disability were also more likely to be unemployed (12% each) than all people in the population (8%).

Unemployment and participation rates were also related to the level of core activity restriction. Less than one-fifth (19%) of people with a profound activity restriction were participating in the labour force in 1998, probably contributing to a relatively low unemployment rate (7%). People who had a mild core activity restriction were much less likely than all people to be participating in the labour force (57% compared with 76%) and had an unemployment rate of 9%. The unemployment rate was highest for people identified as having a schooling or employment restriction only (15%). This group had relatively high participation rates in the labour force (64%).

**Table 1.2: People aged 15 to 64 years living in households: labour force status by restriction level and disability status, Australia, 1998**

|                                               | Full-time workers ('000) | Part-time workers ('000) | Total ('000)   | Unemployed ('000) | Total in the labour force ('000) | Total ('000)    | Unemployment rate (%) | Participation rate (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Core activity restriction <sup>(a)</sup>      |                          |                          |                |                   |                                  |                 |                       |                        |
| Profound                                      | 13.8                     | *8.2                     | 22.0           | **1.8             | 23.7                             | 125.8           | 7.4                   | 18.9                   |
| Severe                                        | 71.7                     | 57.8                     | 129.5          | 17.0              | 146.5                            | 364.8           | 11.6                  | 40.2                   |
| Moderate                                      | 101.8                    | 64.7                     | 166.5          | 25.1              | 191.6                            | 413.7           | 13.1                  | 46.3                   |
| Mild                                          | 195.1                    | 107.1                    | 302.3          | 31.0              | 333.3                            | 589.9           | 9.3                   | 56.5                   |
| Schooling or employment restriction (only)    | 105.0                    | 47.9                     | 152.8          | 27.8              | 180.7                            | 281.2           | 15.4                  | 64.3                   |
| All with specific restrictions <sup>(b)</sup> | 487.4                    | 285.7                    | 773.1          | 102.7             | 875.8                            | 1,775.4         | 11.7                  | 49.3                   |
| Schooling or employment restriction (all)     | 362.6                    | 232.5                    | 595.1          | 88.5              | 683.6                            | 1,474.6         | 12.9                  | 46.4                   |
| All with disability <sup>(c)</sup>            | 639.7                    | 333.6                    | 973.3          | 126.8             | 1,100.2                          | 2,066.7         | 11.5                  | 53.2                   |
| No disability                                 | 5,472.0                  | 2,191.2                  | 7,663.2        | 652.7             | 8,316.0                          | 10,388.4        | 7.8                   | 80.1                   |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>6,111.7</b>           | <b>2,524.9</b>           | <b>8,636.6</b> | <b>779.6</b>      | <b>9,416.1</b>                   | <b>12,455.0</b> | <b>8.3</b>            | <b>75.6</b>            |

(a) Core activities comprise communication, mobility and self-care.

(b) Total may be less than the sum of the components as persons may have both a core activity restriction and a schooling or employment restriction.

(c) Includes those who do not have a specific restriction.

Note: Estimates marked with an asterisk (\*) have relative standard errors (RSEs) between 25% and 50% and should be treated with caution. Estimates marked with a double asterisk (\*\*) have RSEs greater than 50% and are considered too unreliable for general use.

Source: ABS 1998a:35.

It is difficult to obtain reliable statistical information about disability among particular groups – such as people of non-English-speaking background or of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin – because of sampling errors which arise for small estimates (AIHW 1995:304).

## 1.2 Employment services in Australia

Under the Commonwealth *Disability Services Act 1986*, employment services fall into two main categories: open employment services and supported employment services. In open employment services, employment assistance is provided by a service outlet to clients whose employment contracts are with another organisation or who are self-employed. In supported employment services, employment assistance is provided by a service outlet for workers in business services, work crews and/or contract labour arrangements, where the workers' employment contracts are with the service outlet.

The NIMS data collection relates to open employment services only. These organisations provide a range of services including employment preparation, job search, placement and post-placement support. The aim is that, after an initial period of support, the support worker will gradually withdraw so that eventually the client will be fully integrated into the workforce. Some clients will continue to require ongoing support to retain their job. The target group for these services is people with disabilities who have the capacity to retain employment in the open labour market but who need assistance with training and placement along with some ongoing support. Generally, clients receive award wages; however, in some cases, wages may be based on the level of productivity.

## 1.3 NIMS data system and its development

### History

The development of the NIMS data system was initiated in 1992 by service providers wishing to enhance their own information management systems, facilitate the exchange of data with one another and satisfy national statistical reporting requirements. The (then) Department of Human Services and Health supported a study, which resulted in a proposal for the system and the data items to be collected. In mid-1994, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare was invited to become involved with the implementation of the system. After a brief cycle of finalising development, testing and training, the system began on 1 January 1995, with the Institute as Data Manager and an independent Industry Development Manager representing service providers in the ongoing use and development of the system. Further historical background can be found in Anderson & Wisener (1997:5).

### System outline and objectives

Outlets have been provided with a computerised system comprising software (called NIMS), standardised definitions and data items relating to clients (demographics, disabilities, current job, job history), outlets (location, number of staff, staff activities) and employers (location, type of industry).

The system tracks service users through the service, monitoring their progression through different phases (applicant, job seeker, worker, independent worker). Data are entered into the system by the outlet on a regular basis. With the permission of clients, anonymised client data are sent to the Institute on a quarterly basis and uploaded into a central database.

Over the 12 months to 30 June 1998, NIMS was used by 344 outlets, of which 334 provided complete download data in time for inclusion in this publication.

The objectives of the National Information Management System (NIMS) are:

- to enable outlets to collect and manage information about their services, its resources and its clients with a goal of improving service quality and client outcomes;
- to provide the Department of Family and Community Services with comprehensive statistical information (apart from financial accountability data) about open employment services funded under the Disability Services Act; and
- to enable the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to support these objectives and fulfil its own charter to develop, analyse and disseminate national statistics on disability services.

## **A tripartite system**

One of the special features of NIMS has been the involvement of three parties: the industry (represented by the Industry Development Manager), the Department of Family and Community Services, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

The Industry Development Manager is a recent service provider who is responsible for helping agencies use the data, in particular to improve services and outcomes for clients. The Industry Development Manager liaises with and provides advice to agencies about the system and its correct use, notes any need for changes in the system, data or reports produced and produces a range of individualised reports for service use.

The Department of Family and Community Services is responsible for national policy on employment services for people with a disability, and funding all the open employment services on the NIMS system as well as approximately 550 other employment services (chiefly, supported employment services). Project officers in the State and Territory offices of the department are users of the data from NIMS, as are the policy and planning areas of the department.

The Institute, as Data Manager, is responsible for administering a central database of all data from the outlets, the collation, analysis and reporting of the data, and for ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of all data received, in line with its legislative responsibilities. This role is consistent with the Institute's legislative charter to develop, collate, analyse and disseminate national data on community services. Specific system responsibilities include:

- routine management including the routine receipt of data from outlets on a quarterly basis, checking their validity, liaising with agencies to resolve any problems, and uploading data to the Institute's NIMS central database;
- routine system review and development and advice on related developments; and
- data analysis and dissemination, including producing and distributing a wide range of data from the central database, for example, publishing quarterly feedback data briefings for outlets and producing quarterly data in electronic form for the Department of Family and Community Services and the Industry Development Manager.