

1 Introduction: employment and people with disabilities

The National Information Management System (NIMS) for open employment services for people with a disability was introduced on 1 January 1995. Open employment agencies enter data into a specially designed data capture application and, at the end of each quarter, send data to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), where it is collated into a national data set.

The AIHW releases analyses of NIMS data on a quarterly basis in the form of NIMS Data Briefings. A comprehensive report entitled *Open Employment Services for People with Disabilities 1995: The First Year of NIMS Data* was also released detailing the first four quarters of the collection (Anderson & Wisener 1997). Both of these sources will be referred to throughout this publication.

This report analyses data primarily from the 1995–96 and 1996–97 financial years. The aim of the report is to provide useful comparative information to the open employment agencies that supply NIMS data, their clients, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family 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, an outline of open employment models and services in Australia, and a description of the NIMS data system and its development. For a brief history of employment services for people with disabilities please refer to *Open Employment Services for People with Disabilities 1995: The First Year of NIMS Data*.

The remaining chapters present and discuss analyses of 1995–96 and 1996–97 NIMS data:

- Chapter 2 focuses on service providers;
- Chapter 3 presents client characteristics;
- Chapter 4 describes client job profiles;
- Chapter 5 analyses information about the job experience and related factors of clients of the services; and
- Chapter 6 discusses client support.

1.1 Disability in Australia

Population data

The 1993 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers identified 'handicap' when a person with a disability also had a limitation or restriction in performing certain specific tasks associated with daily living, due to their disability (ABS 1993). The limitation must be due to a disability and relate to one or more of five activity areas—self-care, mobility, verbal communication, schooling, and employment.

According to ABS survey definitions, severity of handicap is based on a person's ability to perform tasks relevant to the three areas of handicap—self-care, mobility and verbal communication. People with mild handicap require no personal help or supervision and have no difficulty in performing any of the specified tasks, but use an aid. People with moderate handicap require no personal help or supervision but have difficulty in performing one or more of the tasks. People with profound or severe handicap are those who sometimes, or always, require personal assistance or supervision in one or more of the activity areas of self-care, mobility or verbal communication. These people are thus a major target population group for a range of support services (AIHW 1995:245).

In 1993, an estimated 2,500,200 (14.2% of the total population) reported a 'handicap' as defined by the ABS (Table 1.1). For people aged under 65 there were few age and sex differences in the rates of handicap, with the exception of the higher rates of moderate and mild handicap for males in the 5 to 14 and 60 to 64 groups. Females aged 65 and over had much higher rates of profound and severe handicap.

Where people reported handicap in more than one area, the severity of total handicap was taken to be the highest level of severity in any of the areas of self-care, mobility and verbal communication. The level of severity of handicap was not determined for children under age 5 and for people with only an employment or schooling limitation (ABS 1993).

Using data from the 1993 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers it was estimated that the total number of people reporting a 'profound or severe handicap' was 721,000, (slightly over 4% of the total population aged 5 and above), of whom 306,000 were people aged 15 to 64 (2.6% of people in that age group) (AIHW 1995:245; AIHW 1997:294).

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^(a)

	Profound	Severe	Moderate	Mild	ND ^(b)	Total	Total ('000)
Males							
0–4 ^(c)	—	—	—	—	4.8	4.8	31.7
5–14	1.7	1.2	0.9	1.9	2.2	7.9	103.5
15–24	0.9	0.4	0.4	1.7	1.7	5.0	70.6
25–29	0.6	1.0	0.8	1.9	1.7	6.0	41.3
30–44	0.8	1.5	1.7	3.0	1.8	8.7	180.3
45–59	1.3	2.4	3.7	7.7	3.2	18.3	260.5
60–64	2.3	2.3	7.1	16.5	6.0	34.2	122.0
65+	8.8	3.8	10.2	21.5	2.8	47.2	416.9
0–64	1.0	1.3	1.7	3.7	2.5	10.3	809.9
Total	1.8	1.5	2.6	5.5	2.6	14.0	1,226.7
Total ('000)	160.0	133.5	226.2	482.1	224.8	1,226.7	
Females							
0–4 ^(c)	—	—	—	—	3.9	3.9	24.8
5–14	1.4	0.7	0.7	1.1	1.4	5.1	63.3
15–24	0.8	0.6	0.6	2.3	1.0	5.4	72.5
25–29	0.6	1.2	1.1	2.5	0.6	6.0	40.9
30–44	0.6	1.8	1.4	3.4	1.5	8.7	180.1
45–59	1.5	2.9	3.6	6.6	2.9	17.6	241.3
60–64	2.5	2.3	5.4	11.4	2.5	24.0	86.3
65+	15.9	4.8	9.3	16.9	1.5	48.5	564.4
0–64	1.0	1.4	1.6	3.4	1.8	9.2	709.1
Total	2.9	1.9	2.6	5.2	1.8	14.4	1,273.5
Total ('000)	259.9	167.6	229.2	459.6	157.1	1,273.5	
Persons							
0–4 ^(c)	—	—	—	—	4.4	4.4	56.4
5–14	1.5	0.9	0.8	1.5	1.8	6.6	166.8
15–24	0.9	0.5	0.5	2.0	1.4	5.2	143.2
25–29	0.6	1.1	0.9	2.2	1.1	6.0	82.1
30–44	0.7	1.6	1.6	3.2	1.7	8.7	360.4
45–59	1.4	2.7	3.7	7.2	3.0	18.0	501.8
60–64	2.4	2.3	6.3	13.9	4.2	29.1	208.3
65+	12.8	4.4	9.7	18.9	2.1	47.9	981.3
0–64	1.0	1.4	1.7	3.6	2.2	9.7	1,519.0
Total	2.4	1.7	2.6	5.3	2.2	14.2	2,500.2
Total ('000)	419.9	301.1	455.5	941.8	382.0	2,500.2	

(a) Estimates of 1,900 or less have a relative standard error (RSE) of 50% or more. Estimates of 8,000 or less have an RSE of 25% or more. These estimates should be interpreted accordingly.

(b) Not determined: This group comprises all children with a disability aged 0–4 years and people who had a schooling or employment limitation only.

(c) Severity of handicap was not determined for children with a disability aged 0–4 years. Some totals include people aged 5–64 only.

Source: AIHW 1995, Table 6.1, based on ABS 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, unpublished data.

Table 1.2 presents data on some social and economic characteristics of working age people with a disability living in households. People with a disability were more likely to live alone and more likely to be recipients of government pensions or benefits than the general population. This pattern was particularly true among people with a profound or severe handicap (AIHW 1995:250).

Employment status and labour force participation were both strongly related to the presence of 'handicap'. While 64% of all people were employed, this fell to 45% for people with a disability and 37% for people with a handicap (Table 1.2). People with a handicap were also much more likely *not* to participate in the labour force (54%) compared with people who have a disability (45%) or all people (26%). People with ill health or disability also appear to experience longer periods of unemployment (see Anderson & Wisener 1997:4).

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

	Severity of handicap					Total with a handicap	Total with a disability	Total with and without a disability
	Profound	Severe	Moderate	Mild	ND ^(a)			
Living arrangement								
Lives alone	5.7	9.8	17.8	14.9	17.6	14.5	13.6	6.8
Lives with other people	94.3	90.2	82.2	85.1	82.4	85.5	86.4	93.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Main source of income								
Wages and salary	5.9	14.9	16.3	21.4	21.6	18.3	23.7	48.2
Own business/partnership	2.3	3.8	6.7	7.3	5.8	6.0	7.2	11.2
Govt pension/cash benefit	73.7	58.4	53.4	49.2	47.9	53.0	46.0	22.9
Other regular income	3.9	8.5	10.9	10.1	8.9	9.3	11.0	5.8
Superannuation	2.1	2.5	2.8	2.6	2.0	2.4	2.3	0.8
Workers' compensation	4.4	3.6	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.7	2.0	0.3
Total^(b)	92.2	91.7	92.4	93.0	88.7	91.8	92.2	89.4
Employment status								
Employed	15.8	31.0	35.2	41.8	40.7	36.8	45.1	64.3
Unemployed	4.2	8.8	7.7	9.5	15.5	9.8	9.8	9.3
Not in the labour force	80.1	60.1	57.1	48.7	43.8	53.5	45.1	26.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Not determined: this group comprises all people who had a schooling or employment limitation only.

(b) Totals are less than 100% as some people had no income source that could be identified.

Source: AIHW 1995, Table 6.4, based on ABS 1993 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, unpublished data.

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 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. A full history and description of these service types is provided in Anderson and Wisener (1997:5).

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 National Information Management System (NIMS) for open employment services in Australia collates national data on open employment services for people with a disability and on clients of these services.

System development 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, resulting 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.

System outline and objectives

Agencies are provided with a computerised system comprising software, standardised definitions and data items relating to clients (demographics, disabilities, current job, job history), agency sites (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 agency 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.

The system was installed at 260 sites as at 30 June 1996 and 282 as at 30 June 1997.

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

- to enable agencies 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 Health and Family Services (the Department) 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 innovative features of the system is that there are three parties involved: the industry (represented by the Industry Development Manager), the Department of Health and Family 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 Health and Family Services is responsible for national policy on employment services for people with a disability, and funds 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 key users of the data from the NIMS system, 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 agencies, 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 agencies on a quarterly basis, checking their validity, liaising with agencies to resolve any problems, and uploading data to the Institute's NIMS central database;
- 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 agencies and producing quarterly data in electronic form for the Department and the Industry Development Manager; and
- routine system review and development as well as advice on possible longer term development of the system.