



**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY**  
**AUSTRALIA**

**A voice  
of our  
own**

# **Inquiry into Newstart and alternative mechanisms for determining income support**

**Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs  
Inquiry into the adequacy of Newstart and alternative mechanisms to  
determine the level of income support payments in Australia**

**SEPTEMBER  
2019**

# About PWDA

**People with Disability Australia (PWDA)** is a leading disability rights, advocacy and representative organisation of and for all people with disability. We are the only national, cross-disability organisation, and we represent the interests of the 1 in 5 Australians with a disability. We are a non-profit, non-government organisation.

PWDA's membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. PWDA also has a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement.

We have a vision of a socially just, accessible and inclusive community, in which the human rights, belonging, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected and celebrated with pride. PWDA was founded in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, to provide people with disability with a voice of our own.

PWDA is a NSW and national peak organisation and founding member of Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia) along with Women With Disabilities Australia, First Peoples Disability Network Australia, and National Ethnic Disability Alliance. Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) are organisations that are led by, and constituted of, people with disability.

The key purpose of DPO Australia is to promote, protect and advance the human rights and freedoms of people with disability in Australia by working collaboratively on areas of shared interests, purposes, strategic priorities and opportunities.

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# Introduction

Research shows that people with disability face significant barriers to accessing employment. People with disability rely on income support payments to meet basic living costs as well as disability-related costs.

PWDA has significant concerns about the level of income support for both Newstart and related payments such as the Disability Support Pension (DSP) due to the following structural reasons:

## **1. We face barriers to employment**

As part of our work with DPO Australia, we recently conducted a survey of nearly 900 people with disability for the Civil Society Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Appendix A). Our survey found that 60% of respondents do not have the same employment opportunities as non-disabled Australians.

Our survey also found that we constantly face discrimination. 76.5% of us have felt discrimination or feel like we have been treated unfairly, and 51% of us do not feel anti-discrimination laws help us when we have been treated badly. These findings go some way to explain the barriers we face in access to mainstream employment.

Of those of us who are employed, 1 in 3 of us do not think our employer makes adjustments for our disability. This impacts our ability to maintain a job or forces us to make decisions around the type of job we can have despite our actual capabilities and strengths.

## **2. We face barriers to accessing mainstream education and training**

A large percentage of people with disability surveyed also feel like we do not have the same education opportunities as non-disabled Australians, with 41% of those surveyed feeling this way. Poorer education outcomes represents another barrier we face to meaningful employment.

For these reasons, amongst others, we may find we have to rely on income support payments. Regrettably, income support payments are not simply a safety net while we transition to another job.

Sometimes due to multiple barriers to employment, we are forced to rely on these payments for the long term as our main source of income.

## **3. We have higher living costs**

The Shadow Report survey also found 61% of us believe our income, even if we are employed, is not enough to support our basic needs for housing, food and transport. For

those of us relying solely on income support payments, that feeling of insecurity is greatly exacerbated.

In addition, people with disability incur higher costs of living than those without disability. This is because disability is expensive. We have higher medical expenses, and need to spend more on transportation, and to live in housing that is modified to suit our individual circumstances. We also have disability support costs that we need to meet, unlike those without disability.

When we are not funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) then these cost pressures are worse. As a result, the financial insecurity we experience limits our choices to live in the community, preventing the full realisation of our social, political and economic rights.

Considering the above, and noting the Terms of Reference for this Inquiry, we will comment on the following matters:

- a) consideration of what constitutes an acceptable standard of living in Australia
- b) the labour market, unemployment and under-employment in Australia, including the structural causes of long-term unemployment and long-term reliance on Newstart
- d) the appropriateness of current arrangements for supporting those experiencing insecure employment, inconsistent employment and precarious hours in the workforce
- e) the current approach to setting income support payments in Australia
- f) the impact of the current approach to setting income support payments on people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people living in regional and remote areas
- h) the adequacy of income support payments in Australia and whether they allow people to maintain an acceptable standard of living in line with community expectations and fulfil job search activities (where relevant) and secure employment and training
- n) the relative merits of alternative investments in health, education, housing and other programs to improve outcomes
- r) any other related matters.

# Summary of recommendations

**Recommendation 1** – Establish a Senate inquiry into the adequacy of the income support system for people with disability. The Terms of Reference for the inquiry should be designed with people with disability, and should include a review of the current approach and definitions within the impairment tables, debt recovery processes, and ways in which people with disability can be supported to gain entry into open employment, without being punished through the withdrawal of payments.

**Recommendation 2** – Create a National Jobs Plan to address the multiple and systemic barriers people with disability face in finding and keeping a job. This Plan must:

- implement recommendations from the 2016 *Willing to Work* Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability
- commit to no more people with disability entering ADEs, no new ADEs being established, and a plan to close all ADEs and end segregated employment within the next decade
- set specific targets, performance indicators and timeframes for increasing the workforce participation for people with disability across all sectors
- address intersectional barriers that make it harder for many of us to find and keep work, such as gender and cultural discrimination and rural and remoteness
- strengthen the transition of young people with disability from the school education system into tertiary education and into open/mainstream employment
- integrate with the social security system to support those of us with episodic disability who may move in and out of employment
- have a monitoring and evaluation framework, with key milestones, and specified dates for public reporting on progress.

**Recommendation 3** – Establish and fund a national, multi-sector Disability Employment Coalition to:

- drive development and track implementation of the National Jobs Plan
- exchange ideas and showcase good practice in inclusive employment
- drive strategies to remove the multiple barriers to employment for people with disability
- provide high-level advice to the Commonwealth Government.

**Recommendation 4** – Ensure membership of the Disability Employment Coalition include:

- Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs)
- disability, employer and industry peaks

- best-practice disability employment services
- cross-agency representatives from local, state and Commonwealth government representatives from the NDIA

**Recommendation 5** – End the automated debt collection process for people with disability and design a new process that considers the following:

- the time and support needed to understand the information provided about these debts and compliance measures
- the availability of information in different and accessible formats
- the ability of people with disability to provide evidence for inaccurate debts
- the availability of advocacy to support people with disability engage with the Centrelink system
- the adequacy of steps for people with disability before a debt is referred to a debt collection agency.
- the impact of outsourcing debt collection will have on people with disability

**Recommendation 6** – Maximum rates of Newstart be raised by an absolute minimum of \$75 per week.

**Recommendation 7** – Newstart be indexed (for both singles and couples) twice per year to movements in a standard Australian Bureau of Statistics measure of wage levels before tax, as well as movements in the CPI.

**Recommendation 8** – End the ongoing eligibility restrictions for the DSP to ensure a more adequate standard of living for people with disability.

**Recommendation 9** – The Government respond to the recommendations outlined in the *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve* Report to the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment's Inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive.

**Recommendation 10** – The Government investigate an appropriate rent assistance increase and increase rent assistance accordingly.

# Response to Terms of Reference

## Item A- Consideration of what constitutes an acceptable standard of living

Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) establishes a clear right to an adequate standard of living.<sup>1</sup> Article 28 of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) also provides for an adequate standard of living for people with disability and their families “...including adequate food, clothing and housing”.<sup>2</sup>

Research by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) shows that 13.2% of the general population live below the poverty line.<sup>3</sup> People with a disability experience a greater level of poverty, with Australia remaining last out of the 27 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries when it comes to relative poverty risk for people with a disability.<sup>4</sup>

This means that 45% of people with disability in Australia live near or are below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

Many people with disability do not currently enjoy an acceptable standard of living in Australia. At a bare minimum we expect an acceptable standard of living would mean that:

1. we can meet our basic living costs
2. we can meet disability support costs.

However, as our recent Shadow Report survey showed, 61% of us believe our income, even if we are employed, is not enough to support these very basic needs.<sup>6</sup> Recent

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<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 993, Art. 11

<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, 13 December 2006, A/RES/61/106, Art 28

<sup>3</sup> Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. and Wong, M. (2018), *Poverty in Australia, 2018*. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 2, Sydney: ACOSS: p.15

<sup>4</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2014), *Society at a glance: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing

<sup>5</sup> Australian Civil Society CRPD Shadow Report Working Group (2019). *Disability Rights Now 2019: Australian Civil Society Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in response to the List of issues prior to the submission of the combined second and third periodic reports of Australia [CRPD/C/AUS/QPR/2-3]*, July 2019: p.39

<sup>6</sup> National CRPD Survey (2019) Findings – See attached Appendix A



statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) support this, with income more likely to come from the income support system than employment.<sup>7</sup>

This suggests our reliance on income support is caused by structural barriers. For people with a disability, Newstart and other related payments are not transitory payments. In fact, income support is often the primary source of income.

A recent online survey of our members for this submission supports this conclusion. We found 35% of our members remain on Newstart for one to three years, 24% remained for three to five years, and another 24% remained on Newstart for over five years. This means, a significant majority (79%) of our members who participated in the survey remain on Newstart between 1-5 years.

Therefore, assessment of what constitutes an acceptable standard of living for people with disability needs to also consider the structural barriers preventing us from working, particularly education, health and housing barriers.

Drawing on further data from the AIHW, we are falling behind in the following ways:

### 1. Education <sup>8</sup>

- only 32% of us have completed year 12, compared to 62% of us without disability
- only 15% of us obtain a bachelor's degree, compared to 31% of us without disability
- we are more likely to leave school before 16 than those without a disability (19% vs 11%)
- more of us are attending special schools due to inaccessibility than a decade ago (14% in 2015 vs 10.7% in 2003)
- 1 in 5 of us studying have experienced discrimination, and the largest source of discrimination are our teachers (29%).

### 2. Health <sup>9</sup>

- we are six times more likely to self-assess our health as poor or fair
- of those with severe or profound disability, we are 12 times more likely to experience a very high level of psychological distress
- 1 in 5 of us delay or do not see a primary health physician because of costs
- our health risks are higher across all risks than those without disability.

### 3. Housing <sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *People with disability in Australia: In brief*. Cat. no. DIS 74, Canberra: p.19.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *People with disability in Australia Web Report – Education and Skills*. Canberra <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/education-and-skills>>

<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *People with disability in Australia Web Report – Health*. Canberra <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/health>>

<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *People with disability in Australia Web Report – Housing*. Canberra <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/housing>>

- 8.1% of people accessing Specialist Homelessness Services have a disability and 34% have a severe or profound disability.
- of those seeking homelessness services, 42% seek them for basic accommodation
- we are 4 times more likely to live in social housing than those without disability
- 2 in 5 social housing households (42%) have at least one person with disability.

These statistics show the standard of living for people with a disability clearly needs to be improved. Structural and systemic barriers prevent us from achieving the same standard of living as everyone else on even the most basic indicators such as health, housing, education and employment.

Until these structural barriers are removed, we will be reliant on the safety net that income support provides. Because of the entrenched structural barriers to employment of people of disability in Australia, we recommend the following:

**Recommendation 1** – Establish a Senate inquiry into the adequacy of the income support system for people with disability. The Terms of Reference for the inquiry should be designed with people with disability, and should include a review of the current approach and definitions within the impairment tables, debt recovery processes, and ways in which people with disability can be supported to gain entry into open employment, without being punished through the withdrawal of payments.

## **Item B- The labour market, unemployment and underemployment in Australia, including the structural causes of long term reliance on Newstart**

The employment rates for people with disability are unacceptably low. Only 48% of people with disability of working age are employed, compared to 79% of our non-disabled peers.<sup>11</sup> This gap has not changed in decades. When compared with other OECD countries, Australia ranks 21 out of 29 in employment participation rates for people with disability.<sup>12</sup>

Since 2010, the Commonwealth Government has introduced measures to force many of us off social security payments and into jobs. However, this approach hasn't worked. It has failed to address the systemic barriers we face in gaining access to open employment.

We need a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to enable employers to create meaningful, flexible and inclusive employment, make workplaces more accessible, remove discrimination and build positive employer and community attitudes.

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<sup>11</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *People with disability in Australia Web Report – Employment*. Canberra <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dis/73-1/people-with-disability-in-australia/employment/employment-rate-and-type>>

<sup>12</sup> National Disability Insurance Agency (2018). *COAG Disability Reform Council Quarterly Report, 31 December 2018* (2018 Q2 Report). Canberra: p.18

## 1. The Commonwealth Government needs to be a model employer

This needs to start with the Commonwealth Government becoming a model employer. Despite efforts through the *As One: Making it Happen – APS Disability Employment Strategy 2016-2019*,<sup>13</sup> the percentage of employees with disability has only increased by 0.3% in nearly ten years (from 3.4% in 2009 to 3.7% in 2018).<sup>14</sup>

The APS also has difficulty retaining diverse talent. The ability to retain employees with a disability in the APS diminishes the higher the APS level. The 2018 Employee Census reveals the APS can do more to keep people with disability employed.

Of employees in APS level 1-4, 11% have an ongoing disability, with this percentage decreasing to 8% in APS level 5-6. Of those employees in Executive Levels 1-2, 7% have an ongoing disability, and this then drops to 5% of Senior Executive Service employees.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Employment outcomes for NDIS participants need to improved

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) needs to also improve the employment outcomes of NDIS participants. The longitudinal trend in employment outcomes for NDIS participants were last reported in the 2018 Second Quarterly Report to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Disability Reform Council (DRC). It was noted:

Since baseline measures were recorded in 2016-17 Q1 and Q2, overall participant employment rates have remained static. While some participants have been successful in gaining employment over this period, others have left their positions. Of those who had a job when they entered the NDIS, 81% had a job two years later, 11% were seeking another job two years later, and the remaining 8% were not seeking another job. Of those who were looking for a job when they entered the NDIS, 14% had a job two years later.<sup>16</sup>

The NDIS is designed to support us to pursue our social and economic goals. Therefore the NDIS has a pivotal role to play in enabling us to find and keep a job we want.

The NDIA should focus on strengthening employment goal setting in NDIS planning and reviews, with a focus on providing a supported career pathway for participants. This should take a long-term, life-time approach putting in place the support we need to transition through our school, training and employment journey.

The static longitudinal employment outcomes reported in the 2018 Q2 Quarterly Report further highlights the structural barriers to employment are deeply entrenched.

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<sup>13</sup> Australian Public Service Commission (2016), *As One: Making it Happen – APS Disability Employment Strategy 2016-2019*, <[https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/g/files/net4441/f/As-One-Strategy\\_web.pdf](https://www.apsc.gov.au/sites/g/files/net4441/f/As-One-Strategy_web.pdf)>

<sup>14</sup> People with Disability Australia (2019), *Increasing access to mainstream employment*, <<https://pwd.org.au/federal-election-2019/employment/>>

<sup>15</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2019). *Independent Review of the APS Review: Priorities for change*, Canberra: p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> National Disability Insurance Agency (2018). *COAG Disability Reform Council Quarterly Report, 31 December 2018 (2018 Q2 Report)*. Canberra: p.20

### **3. Addressing the challenges with the Disability Employment Services (DES) system**

Currently DES support approximately 160,000 jobseekers with disability. This represents only a small proportion of us seeking employment. However, for those of us who do use DES, the system is not working: only 10% of DES participants secure employment.

We need DES to strengthen their focus on pathways and outcomes for young people with disability who are leaving school and moving to vocational and tertiary education and employment. Without this, we will not address the long-term and entrenched structural barriers to employment for people with disability.

We want higher expectations for school leavers with disability and a stronger focus on career planning, not just for NDIS participants, but for all young people with disability.

Despite the reforms to DES over the last 12 months, we still don't have a system that meets our needs. Independent advocacy and information is required to support us to make informed decisions around our choice of DES providers and assist us to navigate the system.

### **4. Ending the segregation of people with disability in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs)**

ADEs are a form of segregated employment where employees are paid as little as a \$1 an hour. Less than 1% of the 20,000 people with disability who currently work in an ADE get the opportunity and support to move into open employment. This has to change.

We need measures that include clear pathways and timeframes to transition all ADE workers into open employment, or where workers are older, plans should look at progressive retirement.

To address the above labour market issues, we recommend the following:

**Recommendation 2** – Create a National Jobs Plan to address the multiple and systemic barriers people with disability face in finding and keeping a job. This Plan must:

- implement recommendations from the 2016 *Willing to Work* Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability
- commit to no more people with disability entering ADEs, no new ADEs being established, and a plan to close all ADEs and end segregated employment within the next decade
- set specific targets, performance indicators and timeframes for increasing the workforce participation for people with disability across all sectors

- address intersectional barriers that make it harder for many of us to find and keep work, such as gender and cultural discrimination and rural and remoteness
- strengthen the transition of young people with disability from the school education system into tertiary education and into open/mainstream employment
- integrate with the social security system to support those of us with episodic disability who may move in and out of employment
- have a monitoring and evaluation framework, with key milestones, and specified dates for public reporting on progress.

**Recommendation 3** – Establish and fund a national, multi-sector Disability Employment Coalition to:

- drive development and track implementation of the National Jobs Plan
- exchange ideas and showcase good practice in inclusive employment
- drive strategies to remove the multiple barriers to employment for people with disability
- provide high-level advice to the Commonwealth Government.

**Recommendation 4** – Ensure membership of the Disability Employment Coalition include:

- Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs)
- disability, employer and industry peaks
- best-practice disability employment services
- cross-agency representatives from local, state and Commonwealth government representatives from the NDIA

## **Item D- The appropriateness of current arrangements for supporting those experiencing insecure employment, inconsistent employment and precarious hours in the workforce**

The current arrangements to supporting people with disability experiencing insecure employment, inconsistent employment and precarious hours are not appropriate.

The arrangements, in particular the reporting requirements, remain inaccessible to many people of disability. At a basic level, the information we require needs to be available in different, accessible formats and languages including Auslan and Easy English. We should also have clear access to or increased access to advocacy, to support our engagement with the Centrelink system more effectively.

We are also often asked to provide information in ways that aren’t accessible, and with limited time to respond. We expect well-trained staff to help us with questions we may have, or to request reasonable adjustments.

The online compliance also is often inaccessible and difficult to use for many people with disability.

To address some of these issues, we recommend the following:

**Recommendation 5** – End the automated debt collection process for people with disability and design a new process that considers the following:

- the time and support needed to understand the information provided about these debts and compliance measures
- the availability of information in different and accessible formats
- the ability of people with disability to provide evidence for inaccurate debts
- the availability of advocacy to support people with disability engage with the Centrelink system
- the adequacy of steps for people with disability before a debt is referred to a debt collection agency.
- the impact of outsourcing debt collection will have on people with disability

## **Item E – The current approach to setting income support payments in Australia**

The current approach we have today has developed between 2006 and 2015. The changes are summarised below:

### **2006**

1. A ‘comprehensive work capacity’ assessment was introduced for the Disability Support Pension (DSP).
  - a. These changes provided that if someone was assessed as being able to work 15-29 hours per week at award wages in the open labour market, then they would be required to seek 15 hours or more of part-time work a week
  - b. The individual would also be placed on the much lower Newstart payment.

### **2012**

2. New impairment tables were introduced for the DSP, which focused more on the extent to which a person’s impairment affected their ability to work instead of the diagnosis of a disabling condition.

### **2014**

3. A further requirement for ‘compulsory activities’ for DSP recipients under 35 years old was added.
  - a. If someone on the DSP was assessed to have a work capacity of 8 hours or more a week, then they had to commit to a range of compliance activities such as develop participation plans and attend regular interviews at Centrelink

## 2015

4. Medical reports were no longer required from an individual's treating doctors
5. Instead, a new checklist of types of primary medical evidence to support a DSP application were required
6. This created a two-stage DSP assessment, where a person with a disability was required to fulfil the following:
  - a. undertake a Job Activity Assessment conducted by an allied health professional
  - b. if the assessor concluded the person met the DSP criteria, a Disability Medical Assessment with a Government-contracted doctor, who reviews and scores the medical evidence to determine the outcome.

These changes remain today and we hold significant reservations over the changes, including, but not limited to:

- the lack of recognition of the episodic nature of some disabilities
- the inaccessibility of providing evidence
- the inaccessibility of compliance activities
- the inadequacy of capacity to work assessments
- the poor understanding of the two-stage DSP assessment by allied health and medical professionals
- the lack of evidence supporting the changes.

The current approach has seen the number of successful DSP claims dropped from 89,561 per year in 2010-11 to 31,000 in 2017-18, corresponding with a decline in the overall number of DSP recipients to 756, 960 in 2017-18 from a high of 827,460 in 2011-12.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, the number of Newstart recipients assessed as having a partial capacity to work due to illness or disability grew by 83% to 199, 907.<sup>18</sup> This represents a growth rate of nearly 3.5 times faster than the growth in the total number of Newstart recipients over the same period (26%).<sup>19</sup>

### 1. The current approach further marginalises people with disability

This clearly demonstrates the two payments are interdependent. With more people with disability now accessing Newstart instead of the DSP, we have further concerns with how the current approach is indirectly further marginalising people with disability.

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<sup>17</sup> Collie, A., Sheehan, L., Mcallister, A. (2019). *The Health of Disability Support Pension and Newstart Allowance Recipients: Analysis of National Health Survey Data*. Insurance Work and Health Group, School of Public Health and Preventative Medicine, Monash University: p. 11

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*



Recent research and modelling by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling at the University of Canberra found that the current approach to setting both the Newstart or DSP payments makes it “...more likely [people with disability will] experience financial hardship and insecurity compared with all other Australian households”, with those on Newstart at even greater risk.<sup>20</sup>

The insecurity caused by both payments needs to be addressed. People with disability overwhelmingly rely on income support as their main source of income, compared to those without disability, as the below table demonstrates:

**Table 1 – How much do people with disability rely on income support as their main source of income?** <sup>21</sup>

Age	With disability	Without disability
15-24	49%	14%
25-64	46%	8.7%
65+	75%	56%

Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019)

Considering the reliance on income support as a primary source of income, approaches that result in financial hardship and insecurity are unacceptable. This is contrary to the purpose of income support payments. The purpose of income support is to promote an enhanced quality of life for people with disability, enabling the realisation of rights under both the CRPD and ICESCR.

We need an income support system that ends the ongoing eligibility restrictions for the DSP, increases the rate of Newstart and other income support payments, to ensure people with disability have access to an adequate standard of living.

To address these issues, we recommend:

**Recommendation 6** – Maximum rates of Newstart be raised by an absolute minimum of \$75 per week.

**Recommendation 7** – Newstart be indexed (for both singles and couples) twice per year to movements in a standard Australian Bureau of Statistics measure of wage levels before tax, as well as movements in the CPI.

<sup>20</sup> Li, J., Brown, L, La, H.N., Miranti, R. and Vidyattama, Y. (2019). *Inequalities in the Standards of Living: Evidence for Improved Income Support for People with Disability*. National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). *People with disability in Australia: In brief*. Cat. no. DIS 74, Canberra: p.19.



**Recommendation 8** – End the ongoing eligibility restrictions for the DSP to ensure a more adequate standard of living for people with disability.

## Item F – The impact of the current approach to setting income support on people with disability

The current approach to setting income support does not factor in the cost of disability, directly impacting the ability of people with disability to participate in all aspects of Australian life.

People with disability must allocate their often very limited income to overcome the barriers they face. This means they have less opportunity to spend on goods and services that enable them to participate in all aspects of Australian life.

Table 2 highlights how not factoring the cost of disability in the income support system impacts the day-to-day life of people with disability.

**Table 2 – A comparison of the impact of the income support system on the day-to-day life of people with disability** <sup>22</sup>

	<i>All households</i>	<i>DSP</i>	<i>Newstart</i>
Can't afford to buy new clothes most of the time	11%	28.5%	48%
Can't afford to spend time on leisure or hobbies	10.4%	27%	44.5%
Can't afford a holiday away from home for at least 1 week a year	22.6%	46.3%	66.2%
Can't afford to have a night out once a fortnight	16.6%	39%	54.8%
Can't afford to have friends/family over for a meal once a month	7.3%	23.6%	27.7%
Can't afford to have a special meal once a week	11.9%	29.6%	46.8%
Can't pay for fuel or telephone bill	9.7%	18.9%	31.4%
Can't pay car registration/insurance	3.9%	7.7%	13%
Went without meals	2.7%	11.5%	14.4%
Couldn't heat or cool home	2.3%	5.9%	14.8%
Couldn't raise \$2000 within a week	13.2%	37.5%	43.4%
Sought assistance from welfare/community organisations	2.6%	10.7%	16.6%
Sought financial help from friends/family	7%	14.3%	29.1%
Unable to save money most weeks	55.3%	72.3%	88.2%

Source: NATSEM (2019)

Ignoring the cost of disability in the income support system further entrenches the cycle of poverty, exclusion and marginalisation of people with disability. People with disability are already twice more likely to experience deep and persistent disadvantage than the national

<sup>22</sup> Li, J., Brown, L., La, H.N., Miranti, R. and Vidyattama, Y. (2019). *Inequalities in the Standards of Living: Evidence for Improved Income Support for People with Disability*. National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra, p. 21.

prevalence (11.2%).<sup>23</sup> A system that further deepens the persistence of disadvantage is unacceptable.

## **Item H – The adequacy of income support payments in Australia and whether they allow people to maintain an acceptable standard of living in line with community expectations and fulfil job search activities (where relevant) and secure employment and training**

Current income support payments do not allow for people with disability to maintain an acceptable standard of living in line with community expectations as outlined in section (a).

Separately, our ability to fulfil job search activities and secure employment and training is also not in line with community expectations.

We note the 2018 Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment's Inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of Jobactive has already noted Jobactive fails those it intends to serve.

The community expects the income support system should adequately prepare people with disability for meaningful and secure employment. However, this is not the case for us. Full-time placements are down from 44% in 2003 to 23% today, and the shift toward activities compliance and penalties is at the expense of employment services delivering on their core job of securing employment for us.<sup>24</sup>

Only 10.3% of jobactive staff time is spent working with employers, with more than a third of their time (34.6%) being spent on compliance measures.<sup>25</sup> This disproportionate level of compliance does not align with what the community expects jobactive to do.

Considering the decline in securing full-time employment, we raise concerns over the mutual obligations principle that underpins the income support system. We can't expect people with disability to adhere to activities when those activities do not support their purported aims.

We particularly can't expect people with disability to adhere to activities when they remain inaccessible as outlined thoroughly in section (d).

Considering the above, we recommend the following:

**Recommendation 9** – The Government respond to the recommendations outlined in the *Jobactive: failing those it is intended to serve* Report to the Senate Standing Committees

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<sup>23</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. *Australia's welfare 2017*. Australia's welfare series no. 13. AUS 214. Canberra: AIHW

<sup>24</sup> Bennett, O., Lewis, A., O'Halloran, D., Smith, W. (2018). *Working It Out: Employment Services in Australia*, Per Capita, Melbourne: p.44

<sup>25</sup> Bennett, O., Lewis, A., O'Halloran, D., Smith, W. (2018). *Working It Out: Employment Services in Australia*, Per Capita, Melbourne: p.18

on Education and Employment's Inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of jobactive.

## **Item N – The relevant merits of alternative investments in health, education, housing and other programs to improve outcomes**

As discussed in sections (a) and (b) the structural barriers we experience in core services like health, education and housing significantly effects our overall outcomes and standards of living. We would welcome alternative investments in these core services, as an important way of realising our full rights.

We would also welcome investments in accessible transport so we have a viable and affordable way of participating in employment and in the community.

We would also welcome investments in justice, so when we experience discrimination in other core services, we feel confident and empowered to start a timely and accessible legal course of action to correct the unlawful behaviour.

The value of having these core services accessible to us will not only improve outcomes for those with disability but will improve outcomes for all.

## **Item R – Other related matters**

A related structural reason that drives our reliance on the income support system is our struggles to find a place to call home. Every day, people with disability contact PWDA asking for help in putting a roof over their head.

Without a roof over our heads, we are unable to find employment. We need a significant investment in a broad suite of housing measures across governments in order to address this housing crisis.

The Commonwealth Government has a significant role in funding social and affordable housing, through grants to States and Territories. The Commonwealth Government must leverage this power and significantly influence the availability of public housing, including setting targets for dwellings for people with disability.

PWDA, along with many people with disability support the Everybody's Home campaign. We need new capital investment to generate 300,000 new social and Aboriginal housing properties and a new tax incentive or direct subsidy to leverage super fund and other private sector investment in 200,000 low cost rental properties for low and middle-income earners.

We recognise the complexity of housing policy. However, an interim solution would be to increase rent assistance. Current rent assistance, for people eligible for income support, is

\$135.80 for singles who rent. This is not adequate to reduce housing stress for many people with disability who rely on income support.

People with disability also have housing costs that non-disabled people do not share, including limited availability which can push the market price up, utility costs and the need for modifications.

The Productivity Commission recently recognised that rent assistance payments make a significant contribution to improving affordability of rentals for “vulnerable private renter households” such as households with a person with disability.<sup>26</sup>

The Productivity Commission also found the ability of rent assistance to cushion “vulnerable private renter households” from rental price increases has diminished over time as the Consumer Price Index — against which the rental assistance is indexed — has grown slower than rents.<sup>27</sup> This further suggests the need for an increase in rent assistance.

Considering this, we recommend:

**Recommendation 10** – The Government investigate an appropriate rent assistance increase and increase rent assistance accordingly.

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<sup>26</sup> Productivity Commission 2019, *Vulnerable Private Renters: Evidence and Options*, Commission Research Paper, Canberra: p. 117.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

# Appendix A – Shadow Report Survey

## PwDA Survey Findings

June 2019



# 1

## Overview

### Overview

In total, 892 people completed the survey (after removing 4 duplicated responses).

Despite a large number of survey participants, it is important to note that no question had a 100% response rate, making some of the data analysis of a lesser quality. To improve the accuracy of data in the future, including a 'not applicable' option may help improve response rates and generate better quality data.

Overall the findings highlight:

- A majority of survey respondents are unable to access the support they need (61%)
- 44% of respondents do not have access to the healthcare they need
- A majority of survey respondents believe that healthcare workers do not understand their needs (55%)
- 76.5% of respondents have experienced discrimination because of their disability
- 61% of respondents cannot afford to cover their basic needs on their current income or support
- One third of respondents have experienced violence or abuse because of their disability (33%)
- High volume of respondents with ME/CFS, with many free text comments highlighting the acute lack of support, services and research

Beyond the direct data insights from the questions, the free text comments highlighted some key themes including:

- Issues with the NDIS
- Issues with housing
- Social isolation
- Mental Health and suicide ideation

# 2

## Demographics

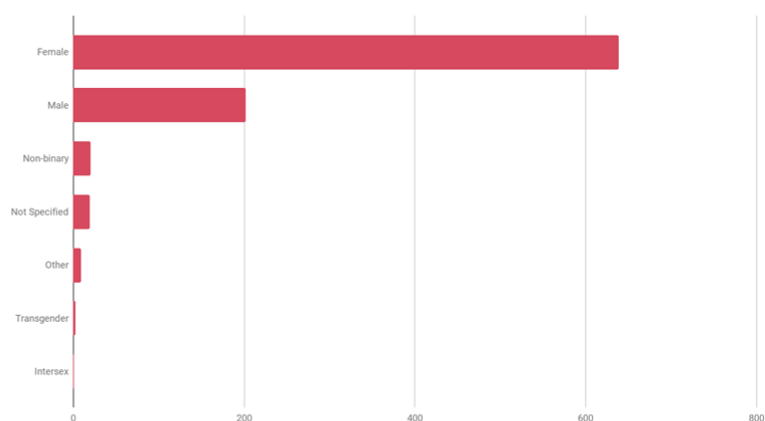
### Respondents by gender

Of the 892 survey respondents\*:

- 72% were women
- 23% were men
- 2% were non-binary
- 2% were not specified
- 1% described themselves as 'other'
- 0.2% were transgender
- 0.1% were intersex

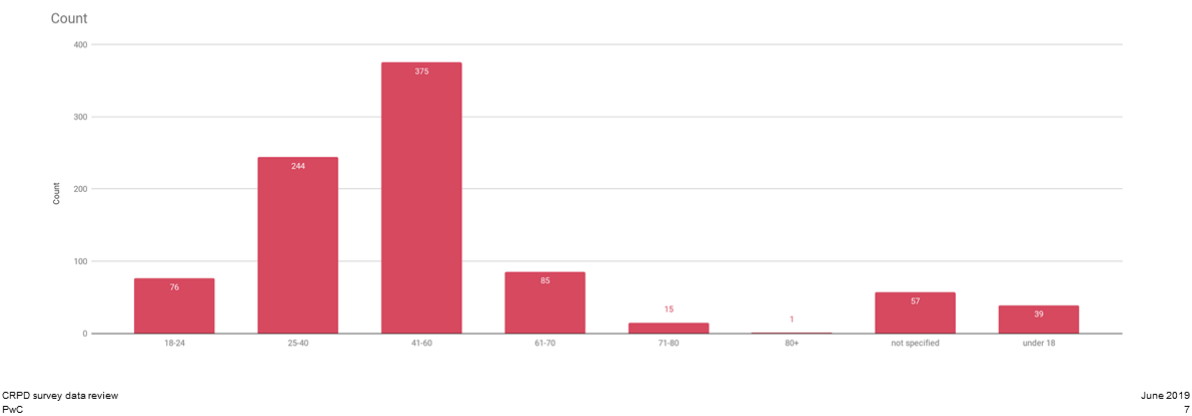
\*To spotlight on Transgender and Intersex respondents, we have not rounded their responses (we round all other categories to the nearest half or whole number). This makes the total 100.3% but we thought it important to highlight their participation.

Respondent demographics



# Respondents by age

While there was a wide representation of age across respondents, 78% of respondents were between the ages of 18-60, with 42% of all respondents were aged 41-60.



# Respondents by location

Respondents represented each state and territory. The breakdown of location was:

- 0.5% from the NT
- 2.5% from TAS
- 5% from the ACT
- 6% from WA
- 10.5% from SA
- 19% from QLD
- 27.5% from VIC
- 29% from NSW

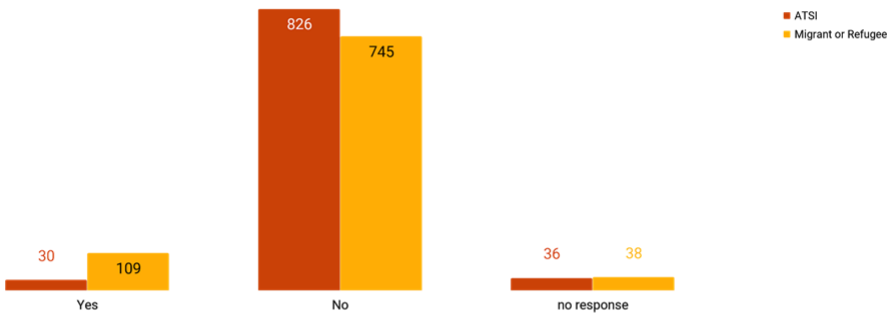




# Respondents by ATSI and Migrant Background

Of the 892 survey respondents

- 30 (3%) identified as being from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background
- 109 (12%) identified as being a migrant or refugee



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Data insights

## Insights: General Support

A majority of respondents (61%) do not have access to all the support services they need. Of particular concern is a majority of respondents (60%) who cannot afford the support they need.

A feeling of not being supported was common among the free text comments, with inaccessibility, finances, lack of awareness and discrimination referred to as limitations in gaining support.

This comment summed up the sentiment of many respondents:

*"Everything We as People living with disabilities [sic] do in our daily lives is made much harder by the fact We live with disabilities [sic] but this should not have to stop us, change us or define us. To quote Stella Young 'We are more disabled by our society than by our actual disabilities [sic]'.<sup>2</sup>*

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have access to all the support services you need, for example, disability support, aged care support, childcare, home-help?	20.5%	61%	8%	10.5%
Do you have access to all the mobility aids, devices and other support you need?	28.5%	50%	10.5%	11%
Can you afford the mobility aids, devices and other support you need?	17%	60%	11%	12%

## Insights: Accessibility of information and communication

Majority of respondents (62.5%) know where to find information about Government services, but concerningly 57% of respondents do not find this information accessible or easy to understand.

Free text comments highlighted lack of closed captioning and/or audio description as a barrier to accessing information.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you know where to find information on Government services like the disability pension and the NDIS?	62.5%	15%	9%	13.5%
Is the information accessible and easy to understand?	17%	57%	12%	14%
Is the information available in your community language?	72%	4%	8%	16%
Do you have the same access to websites, phone and technology, people without disability?	65.5%	17%	5%	12.5%
Is online information about Government policies and programs available in plain English and accessible formats?	37%	18%	19%	26%

## Insights: Healthcare

A majority of respondents (44%) do not have access to the health care they need, and 49% of respondents do not have access to the treatment they need.

55% of respondents believe that health care people do not understand their needs, and just 35% of respondents believe that health care people know how to communicate well with them.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have access to the health care that you need?	38%	44%	8%	10%
Do you have access to health information you need?	47%	28%	14%	11%
Do you have access to the treatment you need?	31%	49%	9%	11%
Are you able to choose the treatment that you have?	35%	40%	13%	12%
Do you have any problems accessing health insurance because of your disability?	32%	35%	22%	11%
Do health care people understand your needs?	19%	55%	15.5%	10.5%
Do health care people know how to communicate well with you?	35%	40%	14%	11%

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## Insights: Accessibility/ Mobility

A majority of respondents (51%) have difficulty moving between states and countries because of their disability. From the free text comments we note a variety of reasons including access to services, accessibility of public transport, lack of support from airline staff when flying, international travel restrictions for those on the DPS and the amount of pre-planning required.

Just 39% of respondents are able to access both public and private spaces that they want. From the free text comments we note that common barriers to access include narrow doorways, lack of wayfinding support, lack of disability parking, inaccessibility of public transport and the heavy presence of fragrances/chemicals.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have difficulty moving between states and countries because of your disability?	51%	18%	9%	22%
Can you access public and private buildings, for example, libraries, cafes, workplace and your friend's homes?	39%	32%	9%	20%

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## Insights: Education and Employment

Just 27% of respondents believe they have the same education opportunities and just 9% of respondents believe they have the same employment opportunities as other people.

Only 30% of survey respondents believe they receive the same pay for their work as a person without a disability would.

Questions related to education and employment had large no response rates, adding a 'not applicable' option for future surveys could provide better clarity and quality of the responses, ie. low responses in support of adjustments and pay would only be relevant to those who are in the workforce.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have the same education opportunities as other people?	27%	41%	10%	22%
Does your school, university or training college make changes for your disability, for example do you get course material in an accessible format, or do you get access to an interpreter?	27%	21%	22.5%	29.5%
Are you separated in your school/university or training college from students without disability?	13.5%	39%	17%	30.5%
Do you have the same work and employment opportunities as other people?	9%	60%	8%	23%
Does your employer make adjustments for your disability, for example do you get flexible working hours or interpreters for staff meetings?	20%	32%	17%	31%
Do you receive the same pay for your work as someone without disability would?	30%	18%	21%	31%

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## Insights: Safety

Concerningly one third (33%) of respondents experience violence or abuse, in addition to this just 41% of respondents feel safe in their community, and only 53% of respondents feel safe where they live.

The free text comments highlighted the frequency at which respondents face verbal abuse as well as the vulnerability they feel to both physical and financial abuse. Some examples include:

- "I have experienced way too many instances of violence an [sic] abuse"
- "It is obvious when people look at me that I am vulnerable"
- "it is very lonely, and i've been in an abusive relationship where my ex was able to control most aspects of my life because he had more money than me and in his mind had more right to decision making. no one noticed he was isolating me, because i am always pretty isolated."

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you feel safe in your community?	41%	31%	11%	17%
Do you experience violence or abuse because of your disability?	33%	42.5%	5%	19.5%
If you have experienced violence or abuse, could you access appropriate support and services?	18%	28%	24%	30%
Do you get appropriate support to have relationships, including sexual relationships?	21.5%	26%	14%	38.5%
Do you feel safe where you live?	53%	20%	7%	20%

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## Insights: Financial Security

Overwhelmingly, respondents believe that their income (whether from wages or social security payments) is not enough to support their basic needs (61%).

The free text comments highlighted a range of challenges related to financial security that respondents are facing. These fell into the below broad categories:

- Feeling unequipped to independently manage personal finances
- Feeling reliant on others to get by. A sub theme here was a vulnerability to financial abuse
- Insufficient support provided through welfare including DPS, Newstart and other services
- The high cost of medical expenses
- Financial insecurity limited opportunity and participation in social and community activities

Some examples include:

- *"I have no money, it is all my husbands."*
- *"The amount of pension for a couple \$36000 covers less than half of our basic living expenses so we must use up superannuation funds. This reduces what we will have once we reach Aged pension age. This is not something people without disability need to worry about. In fact, they get to continue to grow their super while ours diminish early."*
- *"Affordability plays a large part as government pension only covers my very basic needs"*
- *"I have had to make a lot of changes in my lifestyle and the way I do things. The biggest problem is being on such a low income, and still having to look for work, when with my disabilities and at my age, it is not realistic to think anyone would employ me. My depression has worsened dramatically since being on Newstart."*

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Is your income, from wages or your social security payment enough to support your needs such as rent, food and transport?	20%	61%	4%	15%
Do you control your money and property the same as people without disability?	45%	15%	6%	34%

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## Insights: Interaction with Government

Difficulty accessing Government services and agencies is high (67%). This was reiterated through the free text comments demonstrating that many respondents had experienced discrimination or disrespect from agencies such as Centrelink and the NDIS. The free text comments also articulated that language used by government negatively impacts people with disability creating stigma of them being a "burden" or trying to get free benefits.

Just over one third (38.5%) of respondents had spoken to their local politician about disability-related issues, but just 14% believe that their politicians listened to them and acted.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have the opportunity to give feedback to government about issues that are important to you?	24%	43%	18.5%	14.5%
Do you have difficulty dealing with Government agencies, for example Centrelink, housing agencies?	67%	13%	4%	16%
Have you ever spoken to your local politician about disability-related issues?	38.5%	35.5%	2%	24%
Did they listen to you and do something about your concerns?	14%	27%	22%	37%
Are you able to vote in elections, including accessing polling stations and ballot papers?	59%	10%	6%	25%

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## Insights: Discrimination

Of concern is that 76.5% of respondents feel discriminated against or treated unfairly because of their disability. This was supported by free text comments which revealed widespread discrimination across all spheres of life: from service providers, from employers and from the broader community. Some examples include:

- "I often get told I am an abomination, a burden and that I should kill myself from strangers. Often random people grab my chair without permission and stare at me"
- "I feel that, as a person with a disability, I am viewed as a second-class citizen in my own country. I am left feeling that I don't have the same rights as other people, that I am not deserving of the same things others have in life, and that no one cares that we are treated the way we are. Discrimination is rampant and we are helpless."

Of those who felt discriminated against based on gender or race, women were more likely to say yes (245 said yes, compared with 34 men). Of 307 people who responded 'yes', 18 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 9 were refugees or migrants.

Despite 65% of respondents knowing about discrimination laws, just 12% of respondent believe that discrimination laws help.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you feel that you are discriminated against or treated unfairly because of your disability?	76.5%	7.5%	5%	11%
Do you feel that you are discriminated or treated unfairly because of your race or your gender?	34%	48%	6%	12%
Do you feel you are discriminated against or treated unfairly because your body parts are different from ideas about how boys and girls should look? This is sometimes called intersex.	3%	72%	6%	19%
Have you experienced medical treatment because of this? (regarding intersex question above)	5%	63%	4%	28%
Do you know about discrimination laws?	65%	11%	12.5%	11.5%
Do you feel that the discrimination laws help you when you have been treated badly?	12%	51%	22%	15%

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## Insights: Public Awareness

Just 2.5% of respondents think that the general public's understanding of disability is good. This was a consistent theme throughout the free text comments. Some sample quotes are provided below:

- "Unless they have been disabled themselves, they have no idea what it's like"
- "I do believe public awareness of disability and disability issues has increased significantly over the past few years. However, based on the somewhat atrocious comments and questions I am still subject to, I believe we have a long way to go. Such comments include being complimented on my ability to walk, being told I am brave for not killing myself, being asked if I am able to have sex, etc."
- "In a word, no. Ableism needs to be addressed, there needs to be a public awareness campaign about Ableism and Disability but it must be done by and include people with a disability, otherwise that would be an instant fail."
- "I think the general public understand disability as a physical barrier to full participation - it is a limited understanding"

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you think the general public have a good understanding of disability?	2.5%	82.5%	4%	11%

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## Insights: Parenting/ Starting a family

7% of respondents report difficulty accessing services to assist with being a parent.

While the majority of respondents (51.5%) have not had a child removed because of disability, 2.5% have. Comments from the free text highlighted that of those who had children removed as a direct result of their disability, or over financial reasons which they articulated as indirectly linked to their disability.

Questions related to parenting and stating a family had large no response rates, adding a 'not applicable' option for future surveys could provide better clarity and quality of the responses.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have difficulty accessing Assisted Reproductive Technology to help you a baby, such as IVF?	7%	19%	27%	47%
Can you access support services to assist you to be a parent?	10.5%	17%	29%	43.5%
Have you had a child removed from your family because of disability?	2.5%	51.5%	3.5%	42.5%
Have had medical treatment which stops you getting pregnant?	12%	39%	6%	43%

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## Insights: Legal and Justice System

The majority of respondents (41%) don't feel that the legal and justice system are trained properly to support people with disability, and just 9% of respondents believe they have an equitable opportunity to participate in the justice system as people without disability. The free text comments highlight a range of issues with the legal and justice system including:

- A perception that discrimination laws are too weak
- Perceived institution bias/ discrimination against people with disability
- Mistreatment from police
- The personal repercussions people with disability face in response to making complaints
- Too much effort and energy
- A fear of not being believed - "their word against mine"

Questions related to the legal and justice systems had high no response rates, adding a 'not applicable' option for future surveys could provide better clarity and quality of the responses.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you feel that police, lawyers and court staff are trained properly to support people with disability?	4%	41%	20%	35%
Do you feel you have the same access to police, lawyers and court as people without disability?	18%	30%	17%	35%
Do you think people with disability have the same opportunity to participate in the justice system, such as on a jury, as people without disability?	9%	34%	22.5%	34.5%

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## Insights: Recreation

The majority of survey respondents are limited in their recreation activities with 52% of respondents stating they don't have access to social activities in the same way as people without disability, 64.5% cannot go on holidays when they want and 63% can not participate in the sports they want to.

Just over one third (38%) of respondents can participate in the cultural/religious events that are important to them.

Common barriers to recreational activities from the free text comments include the international travel restrictions placed on recipients of the DPS (capped at 4 weeks a year), the expense of social activities, the inaccessibility of public spaces, perceived discrimination, and assumptions being made on their abilities.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have access to social activities, for example plays, television, movies in the same way as people without disability?	32%	52%	4%	12%
Can you go on the holidays you want?	18%	64.5%	6%	11.5%
Can you participate in sports that you want to?	15%	63%	8.5%	13.5%
Can you participate in cultural and religious events important to you and your family?	38%	32%	14%	16%

## Insights: Disaster planning and response

While 42% of respondents have access about how to prepare for natural disasters, just 11% of respondents believe that disaster response plans meet the needs of people with disability. The free text comments highlighted the need to better advertise information relation to disaster response plans and how to prepare for disaster where they exist. The comments suggested that information likely existed but they were not aware of it.

Just 6% of participants have provided input into disaster planning and response in their community.

Question	Yes	No	Unsure	No response
Do you have access to information about how to prepare for a natural disaster, such as a bushfire or flood?	42%	16.5%	11%	30.5%
Do you think disaster response plans include the needs of people with disability?	11%	36.5%	21%	31.5%
Have you had the opportunity to provide input to any disaster preparation or response plans in your community?	6%	56%	6%	32%



# 4

## Emerging themes from free text comments

### Emerging theme - Issues with the NDIS

The free text comments highlighted many challenges that respondents have with the NDIS. The challenges largely fell into the following categories:

- Inability to access support under the NDIS
- Insufficient support provided by the NDIS
- The process is too complicated/ a lack of understanding of the systems and how to access support
- Delays in accessing support under the NDIS
- Concern over not being able to access support in the future, or changes to NDIS support
- Discrimination/ disrespect from NDIS staff

*"The most negative thing in my life is ndis. I feel abused and neglected."*

*"ndis is very hard to understand, I do not get support coordination because I communicate well, but I cannot understand everything and do everything when I am trying to keep my job myself."*

*"I'm severely disabled, but can't access NDIS, because I need expert advice to prepare the application, can't afford to pay an expert, and most funded advocacy groups have wait lists (to help with NDIS application)."*

*"Now that I've switched to ndis everything is more difficult - the system is broken"*

*"The NDIS is not suitable for people with a Psychosocial Disability [sic]. All other supports have been withdrawn since implementation"*

*"Access to NDIS is too hard, and need money first and support services to get community access to get to doctors before can get medical assessments to submit to NDIA... trying to get onto NDIS for 2.5yrs now. Too costly to get assessments. Too hard to get home visits for assessments."*

*"I think the NDIS has impacted and limited a lot of support and service for people with disabilities. Also getting the NDIS one year is not gaurenteed [sic] the next nor is the amount of funding. These things change but the person's disability does not! This grossly impacts a person with disability to obtain the same outcomes and meaningful participation in life like other people without disability."*

## Emerging theme - Housing

Issues with social and community housing, as well as the lack of accessibility of many rental homes also emerged from the free text comments.

*"I am homeless due to not having enough money to cover medical expenses"*

*"In regards to my property, living in Community Housing I need to submit requests to them for any maintenance or changes I'd like to make - like with any rental property, however, here it can take months to see a repair done unless it's urgent. In some cases, ie how there's almost no cold water at all in summer, they won't repair it at all."*

*"House needs modifications but it's hard when you are renting."*

*"But it is old cheap housing that does not meet my needs properly"*

*"I am in public housing & have been waiting for a transfer into a wheelchair modified house for about 7 - 8 years now."*

*"My home is not fully accessible and injures me. But, I can't find anything affordable to live in. Not after paying for medications and therapies."*

*"I don't feel safe Because I don't have the funds to make my house disability friendly, however I do feel safe in the fact I live in a low crime neighbourhood."*

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## Emerging theme - Social isolation

Feelings of social isolation were common amongst the free text comments across most questions. These feelings largely resulted from the following categories:

- Being misunderstood
- Generalisations made about people with disability
- Having an invisible disability
- Discrimination
- Representation of PwD in the media
- Feeling like a burden

*"People judge and do not understand anyone who is different. Understanding towards autism is improving but people seem to believe it only affects [sic] children but children grow up."*

*"The general public still sees DSP and NDIS as welfare. While this agenda is pushed by politicians the general public will always be ignorant. The focus should change from assuming that recipients are trying to get something for nothing to understanding that supporting people to become their best helps the greater community."*

*"I have been refused access to cinemas and laughed at because I take my guide dog. 'How can a blind man see a movie [sic]?'"*

*"Assumptions are made as soon as knowledge of my mental health history is stated."*

*"I think there's a lot of misinformation out there about disabilities, and how disability can include many different things. Also the issue of invisible disabilities versus visible ones."*

*"The general public view me as a piece of garbage. A useless, broken doll"*

*"Invisible illness disability is very poorly understood. It causes problems when using mobility aids, disability parking permit spots, elevators, etc. People can be unfriendly or even hostile if they see someone they perceive as well-able using any of these."*

*"Microaggressions abound. Them and us mentality and masses of misinformation. Access often provides for wheelchairs and assumes that's it. Assumes all disabled people are disadvantaged and on welfare etc. Lots of generalisations..."*

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## Emerging theme - Social isolation cont'd

*"Being disabled is not bad, how people and government and service providers treat you is bad."*

*"People stare, point and some even laugh at me when I go out. I don't really notice but Mum does and she gets annoyed sometimes. Generally, people try to be kind and understanding though but this can be a bit condescending. Most people, don't really understand what it's like though. That's why PWD and their carers tend to stick together - cos we get it."*

*"I cannot live a carefree lifestyle without burdening others."*

*"It makes me feel like an outcast from the rest of the world because everyone else finds it impossible to relate to me and my way of life"*

*"The general public has a medical view of disability rather than the social view promoted by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities."*

*"Because my disability isn't obvious, I get accused of getting help I'm not entitled to [sic]"*

*"So much discrimination and stigma especially around mental illness and invisible disability."*

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## Emerging theme - Mental Health and Suicide Ideation

Mental health issues such as anxiety and depression were common throughout the free text comments.

There was a concerning number of comments referring to suicide, or being better off dead, reflecting the mental health challenges and psychological pressures faced by many people with disability.

*"It affects every aspect of my life from relationships to works, activities, spending time with friends and family and many days I cannot cope with my pain or depression due to the disorder"*

*"I miss out on a lot of family activities due to my anxieties and depression"*

*"My depression has worsened dramatically since being on Newstart."*

*"As a disabled woman the medical system has wiped their hands of me. I think they wish I would commit suicide."*

*"I have been severely affected by the discrimination that I have faced and have tried to get psychological help however it is extremely expensive and government funding/support to access psychologists is limited."*

*"I am so socially isolated and lonely here that I could scream. I think about suicide all the time because I am not allowed to travel more than 4 weeks a year (if that because of the cost)"*

*"it can be a very isolating [sic] experience, and I think depression is quite the norm with people with a disability"*

*"I don't have people I can rely on to help me with anything and most who want to offer "helpful advice" don't know the first thing about how a spine works apparently so it just adds to my frustration and depression."*

*"I can't get the help I need I can't get where I need to go no wonder I think about suicide daily"*

*"Yes I became quite depressed and otherwise emotional about the confrontations I was having at work as a result of my condition."*

*"being dead would be better than being disabled in this world"*

*"I repeat, our community wishes that disabled people were dead. They do not wish to rescue them. We are treated as less than human."*

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**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY**  
**AUSTRALIA**

For individual advocacy support contact the **Wayfinder Hub** between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm (AEST) Monday to Friday via phone (toll free) on **1800 843 929** or via email at [info@wayfinderhub.com.au](mailto:info@wayfinderhub.com.au).

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