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# Community attitudes towards people with disability

## ADS Survey Wave 1 Report Summary

This summary is based on a full report that was prepared by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods and Social Research Centre.

## Introduction

Extensive consultation with the disability sector during the development of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021 – 2031 (ADS) suggested that changing attitudes will lead to better support, improved treatment and more respect for people with disability. To gain a better understanding of attitudes and measure changes over time, the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) funded the ADS Survey – Share with us. The ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods was commissioned to develop and conduct the first two waves of the ADS Survey.

The ADS Survey was designed to collect information on attitudes in the general community, from workers in four key sectors (health, justice and legal, education and personal and community support) and from people with hiring responsibilities. It also explored how people with disability are affected by the attitudes and behaviours of others and the extent to which attitudes can be both enablers and barriers to inclusion.

The ADS Survey produced national representative data for the population aged 18 years or older living in private dwellings. The survey was designed as an address-based sampling (A-BS) push-to-web, offering online and hard copy completion modes. With additional waves of the ADS Survey to be conducted over the life of ADS, we will be able to see what progress is being made on outcomes for people with disability and how attitudes may change over time.

Making the ADS Survey accessible and inclusive of people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds was important. Some of the key elements of accessibility included an online platform that adheres to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2.0 AA, the availability of self-completion, hard copy and Computer Assisted Telephone surveying, an Easy English version of the questionnaire and a number of language translations.

## Key findings

This report presents some of the key findings from the **first wave** of the ADS Survey conducted in 2022. The total number of respondents was 18,188. The report shows that, while most Australians report having fairly positive attitudes towards people with disability, a closer look indicates that people with disabilities' experiences of attitudes were less positive overall. Attitudes varied significantly between the types and severity of disability, as people who had a more severe disability were more likely to be impacted by others' attitudes.

### Attitudes towards people with disability

Respondents of the survey were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) with 20 statements related to the perception of functioning of people with disability in society. The 20 statements (also referred to as the Power scale) relate to five domains – Inclusion, Discrimination, Gains, Prospects and Work.

The responses to the statements provided some interesting insights into Australians' attitudes towards people with disability.



**More than half of respondents** agreed that people with disability find it harder than others to make new friends and have a hard time getting involved in society.



**Only 6% of respondents** agreed that people with disability are a **burden on society**, but **17% agreed** that they are a **burden on their families**.



**56% of respondents agreed** that people often **make fun of disability** and **62% agreed** that people with disability are **easier to take advantage of or exploit** than other people.



Those who had **experience with people with disability** had **more positive attitudes** relative to **those who did not have experience** in all five domains: inclusion, discrimination, gains, prospects and work. This is consistent across all the survey data, including the vignettes.



In terms of prospects for the future for people with disability, **14% agreed** that people should **not expect too much from people with disability**, but only **6% agreed** that people with disability **should not be optimistic about the future**.



Attitudes to employment were fairly positive, with only **3% agreeing that people with disability do not want to work** and **14% agreeing that they work less efficiently** than people without disability.

The ADS Survey also explored attitudes of workers in the four key sectors and people with hiring responsibilities towards people with disability. Workers in the key sectors were asked about their 'confidence in their ability to advise, assist or treat people with different types of disability'.

A majority of respondents felt confident or very confident, although there were variations between sectors and types of disability. Once again, experience with disability was very important. Those who engaged with people with disability most frequently had the highest levels of confidence.



Overall, **93% of key sector workers** reported feeling **confident or very confident** that they respond in a **positive way to people with disability**, ranging from **87% in the justice and legal sector** up to **98% in the personal and community support sector**.

## Attitudes to disability from a different perspective – The vignettes

An alternative way to assess attitudes to disability is the use of vignettes. A vignette is a short description of a situation or scenario which respondents are asked to respond. The survey included a number of vignettes designed to elicit a more nuanced understanding of attitudes targeted at different groups. The findings from the vignettes were less positive overall with attitudes varying significantly between types of disability.

Respondents were asked about how comfortable they would feel working for a boss with physical, sensory, neurological, intellectual or psychosocial disability.



Only **5%** said they would be **fairly or very uncomfortable having a boss with physical disability**, but this went up to **12% for sensory, 21% for neurological, 29% for intellectual and 32% for psychosocial disability**.



Responses were similar across the four key sectors, except that in the **justice and legal sector, 30% of workers** were more likely to **feel uncomfortable about a boss with intellectual disability**, relative to other key sectors.

Workers in the health sector were asked if they agreed or disagreed that a patient should be able to make their own decisions about treatment. While the vast majority agreed that people with disability should be able to make their own decisions about treatment, there was a substantial number who disagreed that people with particular disabilities should be able to make treatment decisions.



The numbers were very small for sensory and physical disability, **rates of disagreement were higher for intellectual (8%), neurological (14%) and psychosocial (16%) disabilities**.

Workers in the justice and legal sector were asked if they agreed or disagreed that a person with disability is likely to be believed if they report abuse. While the majority of workers in this sector agreed that people with disability are likely to be believed if they report abuse, once again there were variations depending on the type of disability.



The responses were generally **more positive when it came to believing people with physical (89%) and sensory (81%) disabilities** reporting abuse, than for those with **intellectual (77%), neurological (75%) and psychosocial (70%) disabilities**.

## Experiences of people with disability

In addition to understanding people's general attitudes and behaviours towards disability, we also wanted to know about the experiences of people with disability when interacting with people in the four key sectors, those with hiring responsibilities and the general community.

The experience of people with disability is complex and is affected by a range of factors, particularly the type and severity of their disability. Therefore, the survey explored the experiences of people with disability from the perspective of the extent to which attitudes of others create barriers to full social and economic participation.

People with disability were asked about their experience with workers from the four key sectors. The vast majority of people with disability agreed that they were treated with respect.



The proportion of **respondents** reporting they **strongly agree** that they were **treated with respect** was around **two-thirds for all sectors**, except for the **justice and legal sector**, for which only **55% strongly agreed** that they were **treated with respect**.

In the context of people with disability or long-term health conditions experiencing unfair treatment, bullying or discrimination, respondents with disability were asked if other people's attitudes or behaviours ever stopped them from accessing or undertaking various activities, including attending community activities, travelling and accessing education.

While the majority of people with disability said that other people's attitudes hardly ever or never limited their ability to attend community activities, travelling or accessing education, a substantial minority said they were limited by other people's attitudes.



Other people's attitudes limited **33%** of people with disability from **attending community activities**, **26%** from **travelling** and **22%** from **accessing education**.

There is clear evidence that people with more severe disabilities and certain types of disabilities (sensory and physical disabilities, compared to speech, intellectual, learning and neurological disability) are more restricted by others when participating in activities.



The proportion who were **often or always prevented from attending community events** by other's attitudes was **5%, 13% and 31%** for people with a **mild, moderate and severe disability**, respectively.



**11%** of people with a **hearing impairment**, compared to **26%** of people with **intellectual disability**, said that they **often or always** felt **prevented from attending community events**.

## Disability and paid employment

There is a very large gap in the rate of paid employment for people with disability compared to people without disability. With evidence showing that behaviours and attitudes of employers affects whether people with disability are able to find and sustain employment, the ADS Survey included specific questions for people with hiring responsibilities.



Overall, **87% agreed** that **hiring people with disability benefits** their **workplace** and **93% agreed** that **hiring people with disability** would make a **valuable** contribution to their **workplace**.

There was little variation between the four key sectors, although the personal and community support sector had the highest agreement rates for both questions. People with hiring responsibilities were also asked if they had ever been involved in hiring a person with disability.



Only **15% had hired someone with disability in the last 12 months**, another **15% had hired somebody** with a disability **more than a year ago** and **70% had never** been involved in **hiring someone with a disability**.



The proportion who had **never hired someone with disability** ranged from **44% in the personal and community support** sector, **68% in justice and legal**, and **74% in health and education** sector.

People with disability were asked whether other people's attitudes or behaviours have ever stopped them from trying to get a job, get a promotion, get a better job or keep a job. While the majority of people with disability said that other people's attitudes or behaviours didn't stop them from trying to getting a job, the results were less positive for people with severe disability.



Overall, **67% of people with disability** said that **other people's attitudes or behaviours hardly ever or never stopped** them from trying to **get a job**.



**52% of people with severe disability** said that other people's attitudes had **some of the time, often or always prevented** them from trying to **get a job**.

## Where to find more and what's next

Further insights and data are available in the full ADS Survey Wave 1 Report, as well as on the ADS Outcomes Framework webpages available at Community attitudes – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ([aihw.gov.au](https://aihw.gov.au)). The data from the survey will be available for approved users to download via the Australian Data Archive.

The second Wave of the ADS Survey will be conducted in 2024-25, with some findings expected to be released in the second half of 2025. This should provide some initial insights into changes in attitudes over the first half of ADS. Subsequent Waves 3 and 4 will be conducted over the life of ADS, providing further details on attitudinal changes over time.