Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031

Creating an inclusive community together

Disability and Young People Report

A qualitative study

> There is a lot of judgement that stems from stereotypes
> and can lead to people dehumanising disabled people
> or simply treating them badly.
> *(Children and Young People with Disability Australia)*

Copyright notice

Accessibility:

Access Hub provides information about communication options (including the National Relay Service) for people who are d/Deaf, hard of hearing and/or have speech communication difficulty. For further information, go to https://www.accesshub.gov.au/

This Report is available online, in multiple accessible formats. For further information, go to Disability Gateway, https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads

Attribution:

Suggested Citation:

Moore, T., Couch, J., Hussey, E., Esler, M., Hudson, L., Gay, M., & Trew, S. (2025). *"A Lot of Judgement Stems from Stereotypes": Young People's Views on Australian Attitudes Towards Disability*. Melbourne: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University.

ISBN 978-1-921975-22-6

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031

Creating an inclusive community together

Australia's Disability Strategy

"A Lot of Judgement Stems from Stereotypes":

Young People's Views on Australian Attitudes towards Disability

Report for the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Tim Moore, Jen Couch, Emma Hussey, Marian Esler, Liz Hudson, Madeleine Gay & Sebastian Trew

2025

Australian National University

cyda Children and Young People with Disability Australia

ACU INSTITUTE OF CHILD PROTECTION STUDIES

Contents

Executive Summary

This report looks at how young people perceive society's attitudes towards disability in Australia. Focus groups were run with 39 young people with and without disability. The groups included people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and carers. Young people shared how other people's views shape their experiences in school, work, and their communities.

This study was run by researchers from the Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, and POLIS: the Centre for Social Policy Research at the Australian National University. The Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing funded this study as part of the work for *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031.*

Key Findings

Young people, including those with disability, told us that:

Disability is often seen negatively

Society tends to view disability as a problem, focusing on what people can't do rather than what they can do.

People with disability are often treated unfairly

Negative attitudes make young people with disability feel excluded, underestimated, or treated like children.

Experience changes attitudes

Young people who had direct contact with people with disability (like friends or family) were more likely to be inclusive and understanding.

The media shapes views

Those with less experience of disability often get their ideas from the media, which tends to show disability in a negative or overly simple way.

Negative attitudes cause harm

Young people with disability spoke about feeling different or "less than" and said these views made it harder to go to school or get a job.

School experiences vary

Some teachers were supportive, but others did not have the training or resources to help, which meant not all students with disability felt welcome or included.

Employment can be hard to get for young people with disability

Employers often focus on limitations rather than finding ways to support young people with disability to succeed.

Young people want better awareness

They believe using social media and real stories from people with disability could challenge stereotypes and help people understand better.

Accessibility matters

Young people called for more inclusive community spaces and better support systems like the NDIS.

Change starts with respect

Young people want disability to be seen as part of human diversity, not something that needs fixing, and for everyone to have equal chances in life.

Recommendations for Change

Several strategies were identified to improve the experiences of young people with disability. These are:

- moving to a view that society should change to include everyone (social model of disability), instead of trying to fix people with disability
- increasing disability awareness through campaigns, particularly using social media to reach younger people and challenge stereotypes
- building peer support networks and more accessible community spaces for young people with disability and their families to connect, make friends and get helpful guidance
- adapting schools, universities, and workplaces to suit different needs of people with disability
- making systems like the NDIS work to meet the needs of young people with disability.

Aims

The aim of this study was to look at the attitudes of young people towards people with disability in Australian society. We wanted to understand how these attitudes shape the experiences of young people with disability, particularly in education, employment, and social activities. A key aim was to identify barriers to inclusion for young people with disability. The study also aimed to find ways to improve views of, and support systems for, young people with disability.

The study included a review of young people's experiences across school, university, employment, and social activities. We talked to young participants with disability and those without. We also talked to young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and young carers.

The research draws on focus group discussions, ensuring that the voices of young people with lived experience are central to the findings. By exploring attitudes and their impact on daily life, this study aims to foster a more inclusive society where young people with disability are seen, heard, and valued. It also highlights the need for change, including educational reforms, media campaigns, and improved support services.

Methods

Focus Groups

This study used focus groups to gather in-depth insights into young people's understanding of and attitudes towards disability, as well as the experiences of young people with disability. Focus groups were chosen because they could generate rich, detailed data through interactive discussions. This type of data could not be obtained from other methods such as administrative or survey data (Egilson et al., 2021). There were five focus groups, including:

- two focus groups with young people with different types of disabilities
- one focus group with young people drawn from a mainstream youth organisation
- one focus group with young people from CALD backgrounds
- one focus group made up of young carers living in a family with a child or parent with disability.

A semi-structured guide with open-ended questions was used to facilitate discussions on attitudes towards disability, personal experiences, and suggestions for promoting inclusivity.

Focus groups were conducted so that participants shaped what was discussed, although the overarching research questions included:

- What are the prevailing attitudes of young people towards people with disability?
- What factors (such as gender, socioeconomic status, family and peer relationships, education, media) influence these attitudes?
- How do young people perceive the inclusion of people with disability in social, educational, work, and recreational settings?
- What are the experiences of young people with disability in the community and other settings such as education, employment and social events?
- What are the impacts of attitudes on young people with disability and how does this affect their social, education and employment participation?
- What would it take to improve the experiences and outcomes of young people with disability?
- What suggestions do young people have for improving disability awareness and inclusion?

Each focus group lasted approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Experienced youth and disability researchers ran the focus groups and ensured the safe and meaningful participation of young people. Young people with disability were helped by support workers to actively take part (Jóhannsdóttir et al., 2022). In some cases, young people communicated with a support person who then reported their views. Other young people with disability were invited to answer using ‘chat’ in Microsoft Teams or to provide a written response to questions.

Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) and three non-government agency partners that work with young people, including those from different backgrounds and young carers. CYDA and partners helped find participants, ensuring a varied sample in terms of gender, sexual identity/orientation, socioeconomic status, and cultural background.

Information letters and consent forms were sent to participants, with modified versions developed by CYDA for the groups with disability. People running the groups made sure that all participants understood the study and their role, could give informed consent and take part safely. The selection process aimed for inclusion, representing young people aged 16-24 years across various demographic groups, and from different geographic areas.

Partner organisations also agreed to provide support to young people in the unlikely event that they became uncomfortable or distressed.

Participants

39 young people took part in the study. There were young people from different geographic areas, young people with and without disability, young carers, young people from CALD backgrounds and young people of diverse genders. Although young people were placed in the five groups based on their lived experiences of disability, their cultural background and caring responsibilities, there was a lot of overlap. For example, three young people in the young carer and CALD groups reported having disability. Also, many young people in the disability group said that they were also formal or informal carers. Twenty-one young people identified as coming from CALD backgrounds (8 in the CALD group and 13 in other groups).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of focus group participants

Characteristics	YPWD Groups n=17	Non-YPWD Groups n=22	Total n=39
Age			
Under 18	4	4	8
18-21	13	15	28
21-24	0	3	3
Gender			
Female	6	14	20
Male	3	8	11
Non-binary	3	0	3
Transgender	1	0	1
Not identified	4	0	4
Cultural background			
Culturally or linguistically diverse	6	15	21
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	0	1	1
Disability	17	3	20

Ethical considerations

The ACU Human Research Ethics Committee approved the project (2024-3813H). Ethical considerations focused on respecting participants’ voices, addressing vulnerabilities, and protecting rights and dignity.

Ensuring informed consent was very important, especially for young people with disability (Brooks & Riele, 2013). Accessible consent forms were developed and verbal explanations were provided. Support workers were able to help participants understand the process (Coleman et al., 2021). This approach meant participants were informed and understood what was going to happen and what supports were available (Moore et al., 2018).

We know that discussions about unfair attitudes or actions towards people with disability can be distressing or uncomfortable for young people, particularly those with disability. To reduce this, we used trained youth researchers and support workers. Participants were told they could withdraw anytime and would not be pressured to discuss distressing topics. The study did not use negative stereotypes, but supported strength-based narratives (Liddiard et al., 2018). Participants reflected on their personal strengths and positive aspects of their lives and highlighted their resilience, rather than just focusing on deficits (Zheng et al., 2016).

Confidentiality was very important. Participants' names were not used, and data was securely stored. We explained limits to confidentiality, particularly around risks to safety.

The research team included members with lived experience of disability or caregiving.

Analysis

Responses from young participants produced valuable data. We analysed the data to answer the research questions. This gave us young people's perspectives on common attitudes and the experiences of young people with disability. This analysis allowed for the development of key areas for focus and helped us to understand the issues important to young people (Punch, 2013; Silverman, 2011).

Data were analysed using NVivo, a qualitative research software package. Two members of the research team conducted coding on the transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998; Padgett, 2008). This allowed for a careful exploration of attitudes and young people's experiences. We looked carefully at the data to identify common themes. The themes and key findings were reviewed by all members of the research team.

Quotes from young people included in the report are examples of the shared experiences that came out in the research and analysis. As we wanted to highlight the views of young people with disability, when there was a choice, we included the views of young people with rather than without disability.

Quotes in this report are labelled (YPWD) to show when it was from a young person with disability, (CALD) when it was made by a young person in the group made up of culturally and linguistically diverse participants, (YC) for young carers and (YL) for youth leaders.

Limitations

The study gave us rich data through focus groups and other responses from 39 participants. The diversity of the group gives us a lot of important information. Given the relatively small number of participants and because it is not drawn using a random sample, the results cannot be used to draw conclusions about the views of all young people.

Findings are also affected by the participants' willingness to share their experiences, which may introduce biases. The research does not directly consider the views of parents, educators, and others working with young people with disability.

Findings

1. What are the attitudes of young people towards people with disability?

Young people in each group were first asked about what ‘disability’ means and the ways that people with disability were understood and treated in Australia.

Young people said that those with disability face a range of attitudes that shape their experiences in society. One young person with disability said these attitudes include: *‘Poor quality of life; Dependent on others; Would be better if cured; Can’t work, rely on social safety nets; Can be seen’.*

Young people with and without disability said that many of these views come from old stereotypes, misunderstandings, and social norms that affect how people with disability are seen and treated. Participants felt that, while people were aware of some attitudes, other attitudes were subconscious. However, all attitudes influenced their behaviours.

> And I think it really [the ways that disability are presented in media and community] just affects, like, just people's mindset, rather like whether they know it or not, like their subconscious mindset about disability... So yeah, it's just very like ingrained so that stereotypes affect like, people's like, really ingrained values (YPWD)

Young people believed that these negative attitudes affect them by shaping the way society treats young people with disability. These negative attitudes can create barriers in education, work, and social participation. They include:

- seeing disability as a deficit (or shortfall)
- treating individuals with disability like children
- assuming disability is always visible
- presuming dependence
- leaving people with disability out of decision-making.

However, in each of the focus groups, young people also talked in positive terms about people with disability, the contributions that they make and their resilience. In such ways, they believed that disability needs to be understood in terms of difference.

> [‘Disability’] just means that they might like doing things differently or need support with it. (YC)

1.1 Disability as difference

Young people often talked in terms of people with disability being ‘unique’: that they sometimes saw the world differently, had different perspectives and could contribute in different ways. However, this ‘difference’ sometimes led people to discriminate, or treat them differently.

> Communities are just [discriminatory towards people with disability] because they're different. They have that disability that makes them different from everyone else, and people don't like accepting that that people come in different shapes and forms. (YL)

In some groups, young people reported that families, communities and other groups often just ‘got over it’ and, in some cases, celebrated this unique way of being in the world.

> Yeah, I heard with the first guy with like who was diagnosed with autism? The first guy back in the day. His community was like, yeah, that's just, that's just him. That's just what he does. He's just different and they were like, just super chill about it. (YL-YPWD)

Central to appreciating difference was understanding the ways in which people with disability and others are similar but also unique. Young people felt that more discussion would help build understanding. However, some felt that it was not ‘politically correct’ or ‘proper’ to talk about disability and that this might limit connections.

> And like another thing was like when kids were a lot different. Like sometimes the questions that would like the way they would come out, like, weren’t worded correctly and they would be met with, ‘oh, you can't ask that question’ and like, kids are left with like, Oh well. Since I can't ask, I just won't. I won't bother trying to, like, hear it out the person themselves. (CALD)

1.2 Strength, resilience and contribution

Although young people highlighted many negative attitudes towards disability, many reported that they, themselves, saw people with disability in more positive terms. They used words like ‘empowered’, ‘independent’, ‘strong’ and ‘capable’. They observed that the people with disability that they knew had overcome challenges that they and their peers would not have achieved.

> I'd definitely say, “You're much stronger than people living without a disability”. Like thinking about? Yeah, [like for me,] being a carer. Like I don't know if the roles were reversed and I was the one being cared for, I don't know how strong I'd be. (CALD-YC)

Young people with disability said that they often had a sense of pride in themselves and their identities. They spoke about 'disability pride' where they recognised how their experiences of having a disability formed who they were, the struggles that they had overcome, and their sense of their place in the world.

> I think in terms of feeling good about myself, I think disability pride has been a really big part of that. And, like, a specific, yeah, a specific, specifically, not trying to deny my disability...I think has been good (YPWD)

Although this was generally a positive thing for others to see their strengths, young people with disability said that it was difficult when others saw them as 'inspiring'. Being seen as inspiring raised concerns that there was a lack of commitment to making life better for people with disability. This also puts pressure on people with disability to navigate barriers in the communities that surround them.

1.3 Disability as a deficit or tragedy

Many of the young people in the focus groups said that there was a widespread view that disability is negative, a personal tragedy, or a problem that needs to be 'fixed'. Many young people with disability find that they are often viewed as objects of pity rather than as individuals with full and meaningful lives. This is reflected in everyday interactions, the media, and even policy approaches that put medical interventions above accessibility and inclusion. One participant said that when asked to think about what it means to have a disability, she said '*To be honest, like I think of all like the negative things for some reason*' (YC).

This deficit-based view also leads to the loss of disability pride. Some young people with disability were frustrated at how people without disability assume that having disability is undesirable. As one participant explained, '*I think there's an assumption that disabled people don't want to be disabled, and that we would erase our disability if we could*'. Young people believed that this attitude adds to societal exclusion, as it sees disability as a condition to be managed rather than a real part of human diversity.

1.4 Being treated like a child and low expectations

Another common attitude is the tendency to treat people with disability like children, calling them 'cute', or treating them as if they are less competent or less capable than people without disability. This is especially common for young people with disability, who are often looked down on by adults, service providers, and even their own peers.

> They see that they're being treated like they might be spoken down to, or they might be spoken to like a baby ... with my brother [it] can just be as simple as them talking to him like a child. Or instead of talking to him, talking to another member of the family when he's literally standing right there. (YC)

Young people with disability agreed and talked about being spoken to in overly simple or exaggerated tones, like one might address a young child. Others recounted instances where their achievements were excessively praised for simply completing everyday tasks.

> I will be very infantilised and treated like I can't do anything, or like I can't want the same things my peers want. (YPWD)

1.5 Stereotypes about visibility and severity

In each group, young people reported that there was a widespread assumption that all disabilities are visible. Many young people with disability shared that if they do not use a mobility aid or have a visible disability, they are often not believed or questioned about the reality of their disability.

> And I think depending... on whether [your disability is] visible or not to those around them, you can have a different perception or not and a different degree of understanding. So, for example, perhaps someone in a wheelchair, there's a something physical that can be cited, versus for [J], with her autism, sometimes people with autism will mask and their extra support needs won't be as obvious, so the perceptions of disability can be impacted greatly from that. (YPWD)
>
> I find that young people get it a bit worse ... If you're young and you're not visibly disabled, you're making it up, or whatever the hell people seem to think, and then you seem to get yelled at an awful lot for that by random people on the streets. (YPWD)

When a person’s disability isn’t visible or recognised, young people believed that this leads to harmful interactions, such as being accused of faking symptoms, being challenged for using accessible services, or being denied reasonable help. Where students with disability are entitled to greater support, some young people reported that there was a view that their peers ‘faked’ disability to get extra help, leading to bullying and harassment.

> My school is very almost not against it, but very cautious because ... [conditions] like autism and ADHD, they're overrepresented in my school like I think 60% of girls in my school are on Ritalin. Because if you get diagnosed with ADHD, you get extra ATAR points. So, I feel like [there are] times like oh, like incorrectly diagnosing, but like [they’re] taking advantage of the resources provided so that the people that. Maybe I don't know how to say this anyway, but like the people that may need the resources more aren't actually getting them because there's people that got diagnosed from the best friend's mum who's a doctor, you know. (YL)

Other young people with disability talked about how they felt pressured to compete with others in terms of the severity of their needs. This was seen as affecting decisions about what support was provided to whom.

> I think it's definitely not everyone, but it can often feel like, when I feel comfortable sharing my needs or challenges with some people, their response is to be like me too, but also like they want to one up each other... I need this intervention. I'm then sicker, almost like I'm worse. I need more. (YPWD)

On the other hand, some young people with disability reported feeling as though they were less entitled to support, compared to those with more serious conditions and restrictions.

> I guess, it took me a long time to even realise that I was allowed to use a wheelchair, because I have the perceptions that you know of what I guess constituted wheelchair use, and my experience didn't align with what those stereotypes were about. ... And so, it took me longer to get a chair than it should have. (YPWD)

Disability is often seen in extremes. People tend to assume that a person with disability is either completely independent or entirely dependent on others. This two-way view leads to misunderstandings and limits the supports available. Some young people reported that the general public made assumptions about who they were and the roles they played and did not appreciate the breadth of their experiences.

> Whenever me and my boyfriend are like, out and about, people will assume that he's my carer, and which would be fine if that's the case. That's not the reality, but that's, I guess, the assumption. (YPWD)

1.6 Incapacity, helplessness, dependence and worthlessness

One of the attitudes about disability that came up the most related to 'ability' or 'capacity'. Participants in all groups felt that communities often saw people with disability as being less capable and blamed the individual rather than society's failure to understand or meet their needs.

> I think folks don't know a lot about how we as a community is capable of doing things, and their misbeliefs can hurt us. (YPWD)
>
> [There's an attitude that] disabled people are helpless or like dependent. Always like when they can't, you know, do things by themselves or live by themselves. (CALD)

When asked about common assumptions about disability, participants also often talked about dependence, with community members assuming that all people with disability require constant care and assistance. This belief can be demeaning and restrictive, particularly when it leads to people with disability being excluded from decision-making or prevented from developing independence.

One of the most common experiences among participants with disability was the assumption that they could not live, work, or participate in relationships without significant external help. One young person made the link between notions of contribution and value to a broad capitalist agenda in which people are seen as ‘less’ if they are unable to contribute economically to society.

> But I think like, the way capitalism exists, [it] kind of creates these attitudes about disability. It creates associations of kind of physical capacity, with worth, with value, with contribution to society, and that any divergence from that, or more often perceived divergence from that, which means that someone assumes somebody can't, you know, participate in this system that we assign value to (YPWD)

They went on to point out that in a capitalist society, individuals were seen as responsible for their own wellbeing, with little thought about their roles in their communities or the shared responsibility to care for those needing support. The challenges faced by people with disability were seen as personal failures rather than society’s unwillingness to actively engage them in their communities.

> I also think there's a big part of the fact that we live in an individualist culture in Australia which kind of talks about people's experiences being individual, and that it's about individual effort and responsibility to overcome oppression, and there isn't really collective culture or collective experiences. And I think that creates these misconceptions and negative attitudes about disability because it posits them as like a failing, like a person hasn't overcome something. And you know, it's their fault that they're disabled, rather than like, how I view disability, which is that I'm like, I'm disabled as a verb by the world around me. (YPWD)

2. Factors that influence these attitudes

Young people in each group were then asked about where they believed these attitudes came from and what the key things that influence both positive and negative attitudes towards people with disability.

Young people told us that attitudes towards disability are shaped by a range of things. These include family experiences, peer relationships, education, media representations, and social norms or customs. Participants who had a family member with disability or who worked in a disability-support setting tended to be more inclusive.

2.1 Personal lived experience

In addition to the focus group with young people with disability, most young people in the remaining groups reported that they had personal connections with people with disability or had a disability themselves. Participants said that this personal lived experience was one of the most important things shaping young people's attitudes towards disability.

> So, like, if they're brought up in a household where there are people with disabilities, they'll view them in a different way than like young people who don't really have a proper understanding of what a disability is. (YPWD)
>
> If you're the first autistic person or first disabled person of your disability someone's ever met, they're going to have assumptions they have based on rumours and stories they've heard or just based on assumptions they have made themselves, and they're going to put that onto you, and it's only through exposure that they can overcome that bias and we can start having more disability acceptance and less bigoted assumptions. (YPWD)

On the other hand, they recognised that people who had not been exposed to people with disability tended to be less empathetic and understanding.

> Non-disabled people are influenced in so many different ways, and if they aren’t exposed to disability through their job or personal life it’s difficult to for them to understand at first how to ‘treat disabled people’. (YPWD)

Those who had a family member with disability, worked in a disability-support role, or had disability themselves tended to have a deeper understanding of the challenges and strengths of people with disability.

> I do a lot of youth work and I guess I get to meet lots of young people from like different backgrounds and different experiences … And I think through that I've met a lot of passionate and incredible young people who obviously have a disability, but they not let that like affect them, and they do incredible work in the community and they have their own hobbies and passions. And so that's kind of how I have interaction. (CALD)

Many young carers shared that their experiences of supporting a parent or sibling with disability had given them an increased sense of empathy and awareness of access issues. They felt that without this experience many people lack empathy and understanding.

> So, I feel I feel like if it was just a random person on the street, like they themselves don't have disabilities and aren't a young carer, they would probably if they just thought about disability, they would think of like what they've seen in the media like TV. ... But there's a lot of people that are only gonna think of people with disabilities in that way. 'Cause, that's just how it's been portrayed to them. So, it's not even their fault. (YC)

Participants with disability also said that their lived experience had made them more aware of social barriers and the impact of public attitudes. Some young people acknowledged that without personal experience, it was easy to overlook the realities of disability or rely on misunderstandings. This emphasises the importance of contact, education, and storytelling in shaping more inclusive perspectives.

2.2 Family, friends and school

Participants said that how you think about people with disability, the attitudes that you hold, and the behaviours you demonstrate are most influenced by your upbringing. They felt that children’s views are shaped by those of their parents and siblings.

> People are fundamentally shaped by their parents and can find themselves subconsciously believing these views even if logically they don’t agree. (YPWD)
>
> [J] just communicated in the chat that the views about people with disability can come from family, and thoughts and ideas are shaped and influenced by parents and siblings. (YPWD)
>
> Parents, ...and then you base your opinion, reaction and perspective on them based on what your parents do after, like, you notice it and they notice you notice. Like, if you know, they act all embarrassed and like, tell you to look away, or something like that. (YPWD)

Young people also said that views about disability were often shaped at school. They reported that when children saw peers with disability being treated poorly, they often learnt to hold these prejudices.

> [Sometimes teachers don’t treat you well when you have disability]. And I feel like that kind of relates to how then the students treat you because ... I feel like kind of take that on board and take that into their own perspectives of how they then talk to you is like. For example, if a teacher is very pitiful towards you, then the students would be, or if the teacher's just kind of talking to you like any of the other students, this other students would just talk to you like you're kind of just one of them. (CALD-YPWD)

Those at schools where disability was accepted and empathy was promoted were more likely to be more understanding and less prejudiced.

2.3 Media

Young people with and without disability reported that ideas about disability were shaped by what is shown in the media. From a young age, children saw characters in the media that had visible disabilities and who were seen as problems in some way.

> I think a lot of views for disability comes from the media, and that includes social media, regular media like the news and things like movies and TV. A lot of disability focused media has its flaws, and so that might translate into people's like ideas and opinions of people with disability. (YPWD)
>
> I think that a lot of views about disability from young ages come from things like movies and TVs, like, for example, villains in shows you know, pirates are often portrayed with missing eyes or limbs, Maleficent is portrayed as having Horns, which looked at as a disfigurement or often again, things like missing limbs or just, it seems like every villain in a children's show has some sort of disability. (YPWD)

They believed that this influenced how people with disability are understood and how they see themselves. Characterised as lesser or as villains, young people felt undervalued and put down unfairly.

Young people with disability argued that the media did not represent their experiences of life. Young people with autism, for example, felt that their peers had expectations around autism based on television shows like the *Big Bang Theory* and *Young Sheldon* where their autism was seen as a laughing matter and diminished their understanding of the world.

> So I often find myself being compared to autistic characters in the media, or if not, expected to be supernaturally smart, like Sheldon Cooper, or I forget his name, but the good doctor, we can all think of it, autistic robot character. (YPWD)
>
> I think also I think media plays a role as well I think there's a lack of presence from the disability community on media and when there is, it's kind of like showing people with disability as pitiful, like those kind of feeding into those stereotypes. And I think that creates like a big problem and I think that feeds, puts kind of these stereotypes into young people's minds. (CALD)

Young people with disability also reported there was an increase in awareness of disability. To a lesser extent, they said a decrease in negative attitudes when public figures 'came out' as having a range of conditions.

> A lot of people recently have known Tourette's because they say, like, oh, Billie Eilish and Lewis Capaldi have it. So, I think because they're two very well-known people, people know about my condition. (YPWD)

In many of the groups, young people pointed to social media and discussed both its positive and negative influence in shaping ideas about disability.

> I would say the people I've met online, like the online culture around I think is more toxic... Yeah, online is a bit different with young people, where maybe people feel like there's not and there's no consequences or the fact that, you know, you don't know who they are or they're not in person. It's a bit different. (YC)
>
> I also think that just in the last couple of years, I don't like the term wokeness because of how it's been weaponised, but it's become less and less okay to cling on to bias, and people are more likely to call it out in public, which I think has also influenced people's thinking. (YPWD)

2.4 Age and generation

Young people said that attitudes towards disability often varied with age. Older generations were seen as more likely to hold old-fashioned or outdated views about disability. They often see it through a medical lens that focuses on limitations rather than abilities. In contrast, younger people felt that they were more likely to view disability as a normal part of human diversity. This was particularly the case for those exposed to inclusive education.

In the group with young people with disability, one participant reported that young people are ‘*more accepting of people with disability*’. Another similarly thought that young people are ‘*more empathetic to people with disability*’.

> I feel like young people are a lot more understanding and accepting in my experience than like older generations, personally. But also, that depends on how someone's raised and taught. But yeah, I feel like young people very naturally open, so they're a lot more, yeah, just like, accept it better. (YPWD)

However, participants acknowledged the crucial role played by exposure. They believed that younger people may have uninformed or prejudiced views if they did not have direct contact with individuals with disability. They felt that some young people could get away with being prejudiced and abusive in online situations where people could share uninformed views or bully or harass others.

Some participants said that students at schools with a strong emphasis on inclusion had more accepting attitudes. However, those without regular contact with people with disability tended to rely on stereotypes. Overall, participants believed that there is a gradual shift towards more inclusive attitudes, but that there is still work to be done to give people opportunities to develop meaningful and informed views on disability.

2.5 Cultural background

Cultural background was seen as a major influence on attitudes towards disability. Some young people from CALD backgrounds said that their families and communities sometimes held different beliefs about disability compared to Australian society generally. This sometimes leads to conflicts about access to services or accepting support. Some young people with disability felt that both cultural background and religion played a part.

> I think that culture communities do think very differently about people with disability, especially at risk of being controversial some different religious groups. When we talk about models of disability, we often talk about the social model and medical model. There's a lot more than that. There's the human rights model, but there's also the religious model, where a person's own religion can affect how they view disability as if they view it as something as a form of punishment or a calling to like help vulnerable people, which is why, when you think back not too long ago, historically, a lot of disability institutions were run by religious groups, and that has affected opinions about disability in different cultures in a lot of different ways, for how young people perceive disability. (YPWD)

They believed this was shaped by a lower level of education about disability and less contact with people with disability.

> I think it's also comes down to sometimes like a lack of education around disability, like kind of a lot of the younger generation now here is more aware of disability because they've, like, been raised in the school system that teaches them. That everyone is like still a person or whatever, and disability doesn't make it different. But I know like in my own cultural community, like my Assyrian community, they're not as educated. In general, but like more so about disability. (CALD)

Some participants also said that cultural beliefs influence how openly disability is discussed. Some communities do not talk about disability due to shame or misunderstandings. Participants felt that these cultural differences highlight the need for awareness programs that respect other cultures while promoting positive attitudes.

Interestingly, some young people felt that some migrants and refugees judged attitudes and supports for people with disability based on their experiences in their home countries. For example, there are countries that provide no support for people with disability, or where disability was seen as a personal failure. The participants believed that Australian attitudes and supports were more accepting and more generous than countries like that. Many young people felt that people with disability had better chances here than in other countries.

> I would say like compared to other places in the world, I definitely feel like there's a lot more over here in regard to that stuff and I see all the all the time where people are actually like trying to learn about it and be like this person has disabilities but are still capable. Now obviously it doesn't happen all the time. There's still people that are going to discriminate, but I think we're a lot more welcoming over here, especially just because, like we're so multicultural. (YC-YPWD)
>
> But I feel like in Australia, we promote [inclusion] … Yeah, I feel like in Australia, there is a lot more accountability and talk. So, if I'm like, discriminated against in public in Australia, I can say, like, that's ableism, and people will understand, however, in Asia, like that's not a thing you kind of say. (YPWD)

2.6 Where you live

Young people said that where you live shapes attitudes towards disability.

Young people from urban areas reported more contact with people with disability, often due to better access in schools, workplaces, and public transport. They felt that in cities, there are more organisations, events, and supports for people with disability, leading to better awareness and inclusion.

> I think it definitely makes a difference like where you are like if you're in you know the in the [country]. Excuse me if you're in like the country, more so I think because it's so secluded, there's just a less of a variety of people. So, you're accustomed to it. (YC-YPWD)
>
> Yeah, I feel like there's still a sense of like boganness and like. Like the kind of idea. A lot of rural communities haven't kind of like caught up with, yeah. (YL)

In contrast, young people from rural and remote communities talked about problems with access resulting from physical and attitudinal barriers. Limited access to disability services, specialist support, and inclusive education in these areas often leads to lower awareness and understanding of disability.

Some participants from smaller towns said that close-knit social networks could be both a benefit and a barrier, with one noting, '*Yeah, I was gonna say that [the rural community] can be super tight, and like, you either feel accepted or you get shunned out of it. I feel like there's no real in-between*'.

While these smaller, rural communities sometimes provided strong support, they also reinforced outdated views about disability. In remote areas, stigma around disability could be worse, leading to exclusion and isolation. Addressing these differences requires special interventions, such as improved infrastructure, education, and community engagement, to ensure that young people with disability have equal chances, wherever they live.

3. How do negative attitudes affect young people with disability and their families and friends?

Young people in all groups were asked how they believed negative attitudes affected people with disability, their families, and friends. In this section, we pay more attention to the views of young people with disability, while still referring to the views of those who observed attitudes and behaviours.

Young people, particularly those with disability, said a range of impacts that they believe came from community attitudes to disability. One young person said that negative attitudes cause people with disability '*to feel sad, lonely and left out*'. However, sometimes even attitudes that seem positive can take cause harm.

> And [J] is wanting to say that the stereotypes are most often negative, and so therefore that can affect a person's self-esteem, it can impact job opportunities, that can cause social isolation, create barriers to education, and greatly increase bullying. ... There's also some positive ones that can actually create a bit of a misleading situation, and they can create a pressure to perform. (YPWD)

3.1 Disability Pride

Disability pride was seen as a positive way of dealing with negative attitudes. Many participants with disability expressed a strong sense of pride in their identity, seeing their disabilities as central to who they are and not something to be ashamed of. This is often tied to the resilience and strength required to overcome barriers and negative attitudes. Some talked about how being able to overcome the limiting ways others saw them was something to be celebrated.

> I think these negative stereotypes in particular, can lead to bullying, discrimination and isolation in particular. But it can also be the, but it can also lead you into something like opportunity into something you would not have taken without the opportunities that you had. (YPWD)

This sense of pride is deeply tied to their lived experiences. They have often needed resilience, adaptation, and a determination to overcome barriers. Young people with disability explained that disability pride enables young people to take back their identity and take ownership of their experiences, fostering greater self-esteem and a positive sense of self. They also believed that embracing disability pride includes seeing disability as a valid and valuable part of human diversity, leading to greater self-esteem and community acceptance.

3.2 Made to feel different or less valuable

Although there was some agreement that individuals had positively managed stereotypes, the dehumanising or harmful effect of these stereotypes came up often. Young people described how they are often treated as less valuable, as society tends to focus on what they cannot do instead of seeing their abilities. This often results in feelings of isolation, with young people feeling not just different, but also less worthy of respect and equal treatment.

> I think stereotypes affect how people communicate with a person who's disabled, and it would make like the interactions not what they could be, and just based off a bunch of false words. (YPWD)

Stereotypes based on misinformation or ignorance can significantly harm the social experience of young people with disability. As another participant shared,

> When society believes stereotypes, people with disability are treated worse as, instead of trying to accommodate where needed to allow a disabled person to live their life to the fullest, they instead condemn disabled people. There is a lot of judgement that stems from stereotypes and can lead to people dehumanising disabled people or simply treating them badly. (YPWD)

Young people with disability felt that the failure to make allowances for or support people with disability as they deserve can increase feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. They also spoke about 'internalised ableism', where they started to believe views about themselves and questioned their worth or abilities. So too, when others see disability at the extremes, they did not like to seek help, believing that others were more worthy.

> I still, even though I work in the industry and I know what supports are available, I find it hard to access them for myself. (YPWD)

A few young people with disability also spoke about how attitudes led them to doubt their bodies and, as a result, themselves. Some gave examples of experiences where this affected their sense of self.

> I don't trust my own body anymore, because I was told it was wrong for a very long time...it is attacking itself for no real reason. (YPWD)

3.3 Having your independence restricted

Young people said that when people made assumptions about people with disability's incapacity, they disrespected their right to be independent and make choices. Young carers gave examples of when they, instead of their parent with disability, were asked to make decisions on their parents' behalf. Also, some young people in wheelchairs said how demeaning it was when people tried to take control of their chairs and take them places they did not want to go.

> Like, do not touch me, if you would, you go to a random like, able bodied person not in a wheelchair and push them for fun. Like, do not come up behind me and push me. That's terrifying. So, it's kind of like everyone assumes they know you better than you know you, and that then kind of ruins your like, sense of self and a whole lot of things, and makes it very isolated. (YPWD)

Other young people reflected that having others restricting your independence is not only about a loss of control over their own lives, but also a strong message that they are not trusted to make their own decisions.

3.4 Feeling tired and fatigued

Young people with disability find a lack of community understanding and empathy tiring. Some reported having to constantly explain themselves, challenge limiting or discriminatory attitudes, or demand respect. This caused them stress and, when ongoing, some fatigue.

> So, it's like, the first thing that comes up when I talk to someone, I have to, like, say it straight away, which can be also tiring because I don't always want to share it. Sometimes people ask me, like, invasive questions or cross my boundaries so it can get tiring, but I think I've done a lot of like, self-work to be able to set the boundaries and, you know, like, introduce myself confidently and not let it get in the way. (YPWD)
>
> One word or phrase that comes to mind when I hear disability for me as an advocate and disabled person, is tired because I feel like I start every interaction at an immediate disadvantage or immediately having assumptions made about me that I have to disprove before I can make a first impression as my actual self, and anytime I want to go somewhere, I have to put in more planning and research than anyone else to know if I can get around safely. And I just think being disabled creates a lot of extra work that, honestly will put an un-disabled person into it, they'd probably need a stress leave. (YPWD)

3.5 Mental health impacts

Many of the young people reported that constantly being bombarded with negative attitudes affected their mental health and wellbeing. They said being made to feel worthless, a burden or different harmed their sense of self and inclusion in community.

> Your personhood is constantly being questioned. You're being treated differently, and like I might be having a good day, and someone will question whether I really do have a disability or I might be having an awful day and look terrible. And some parents will whisper to their child, you don't really want to turn out like them, do you or I might just be wanting to talk to a friend, but rather than listening, they're thinking that I shouldn't be complaining, because others have it worse and it's so draining. (YPWD)

> The way society treats people with disability, this affects and shapes what is socially acceptable to the society. And the effect on young people with disability is that it can raise doubt about young peoples with disability self-worth. (YPWD)

Some believed that this was particularly the case for young people.

> Young people with disability have an added layer of difficulty getting their disability understood as the stereotypes of disabled people are usually applied more harshly with a younger age... This can lead to many issues such as poor mental health. (YPWD)

Young people often talked about the impacts in terms of their mental health, referring to anxiety, low self-esteem and depression.

> Because of these kind of issues, it lowers the self-esteem also and social isolation. (YC)
>
> I'm confident in my disabled identity. I still get anxious about people, like, perceiving the things I'm doing as to mean that I'm like, faking needing a wheelchair, ... And so, for me, it means that, like, I am more exhausted just going about my day, doing my things. (YPWD)
>
> I was diagnosed mid 2022 with chronic anxiety in public, so I went months at a time without going to school. (YC-YPWD)

In the most extreme cases, young people spoke about feeling suicidal and thinking about harming themselves because of the bullying and harassment that they experienced.

> My previous high school was horrendous. If you were seen as different or say you were autistic, you would be bullied to the point of. There were multiple cases of students ending up in the hospital due to bullying from suicidal ideation. People were suicidal about them being autistic or...Having different disabilities and that they were picked on and bullied and just seen as a social outcast. (YC-YPWD)

3.6 The Impact of negative attitudes on families and friends

Young carers in the focus groups shared that negative attitudes towards disability not only affect individuals with disability but also their families and friends. Young people with disability and young carers reported being angry about the way people with disability are treated.

> As a carer you feel very angry... You know the injustice of how people are treated. (CALD-YC)

Others talked about how community attitudes affected their own wellbeing and their relationships with others. Many described experiencing judgment and misunderstanding from peers and educators when advocating for their family members.

> My mum, she has disability. So basically, in my daily life, I interact with people with disability. It's ... sometimes fun, sometimes little bit difficult but ... I try to make most out of it... Like it's challenging to take care of like my mum because my mum, like mum normally, usually [needs help]. And then take care of the house. [In my culture mothers usually are caregivers but mine had an accident]. And so now that the responsibility has to fall on like the child or oldest, it's a little bit difficult because even in [Year] 12, having to take care of that stuff. And trying to juggle year 12 as well. And [taking care of the] little kids like my little sister and house chores in general. (YC)
>
> So, my mum's the one with disability. Sometimes, actually, most of the times it's hard to understand my mum's needs. Sometimes the communication error always happens. So that's one thing that I like to work on. (YC)

Young carers also talked about the toll that caring could take, particularly when unsupported. Some had significant caring roles which influenced their own ability to go to school or university, to spend time with friends, or engage with the broader community. The day-to-day responsibilities were also seen as being tiring, but carers said they needed to ‘keep things together’ so that they could provide the care their relative needed.

> With my brother, for example, when he's really upset, really upset, trying to calm him down, get him to do the right thing. But it's just. It's like, you know, always battling. It's hard to deal with someone that is struggling to be calm and be calm yourself. It's always important to try to do that anyways to get the best result for them. (YC)

At school, young carers often felt isolated due to the lack of awareness among teachers and classmates about their caregiving responsibilities. Some faced difficulties balancing schoolwork with their caring duties. A lack of support compounded feelings of stress and exclusion. Friendships were also affected, with some young carers reporting that peers distanced themselves due to a lack of understanding about disability.

Young carers said that community attitudes often made feelings of invisibility worse, with families struggling to access resources due to stigma or red tape. These experiences highlight the need for increased awareness and support for individuals with disability and their caregivers to live in a more inclusive and understanding society.

4. Education

Young people with disability talked about how schools and universities helped or hindered their learning. Young people in other groups talked about their observations about how schools and universities promoted inclusion. Given the fact that most young people were school-aged and, thus discussion about higher education was limited.

4.1 Young people's experiences in education

Young people with disability report a range of experiences in education, with many noting the value of school as a place to learn, make friends, and feel a sense of belonging. However, the level of inclusion and support they receive varies a lot between schools. Although young people reported that some schools provide meaningful, reasonable adjustments, others fail to meet even basic accessibility needs such as ramps. This is often due to differing levels of disability awareness and resources within schools.

> Some teachers were very inclusive, very understanding, whereas others weren’t. (YPWD)

Many students were frustrated with the stigma surrounding their disabilities and its impact on their education. The stereotype that students with disability are not capable of excelling can severely limit their chances and affect their self-esteem.

> Some people think that they're not able to learn...and this is a stigma that's completely wrong. (YC)

Young people told us that engagement in school is much better when students with disability receive support that is tailored to their individual needs. One young person explained, ‘*When I was able to study at my own pace, I actually did better*’ (YPWD). This highlights the importance of allowing students to work at their own speed, which can make a big difference in their academic success.

However, many participants felt that the support they received was often too generic. This can undermine the effectiveness of support services, leaving students without the specific help they need.

> Often there is a copy-and-paste response given so that all students, no matter their individual disability, are all given the same support provision. (YPWD)

Young people with disability believed that it was important that all teachers and lecturers were aware of support arrangements and reasonable changes that had been agreed. Young people with disability should be able to expect consistency without needing to constantly ask for their needs to be met.

> Often the supports can look inclusive and supportive on an IEP (Individual Education Plan) for example, but it often lacks the appropriate understanding and delivery of those required supports. For example, only one or two teachers providing the support provisions instead of all of the teachers providing the provisions. (YPWD)

Also important in engagement in school was young people's sense of belonging. For many young people with disability, finding spaces where they can connect with others who share similar experiences was key to feeling included. As one young person with disability put it, '*finding other disabled students made me feel like I actually belonged.*' This sense of community is key to building confidence and supporting greater participation in school life. Participants also noted the importance of disability-inclusive spaces, with some suggesting that schools could establish disability clubs to help bridge social gaps and improve inclusion.

4.2 Barriers to engaging in education

Several barriers prevent young people with disability from fully engaging in school. Physical accessibility remains a major problem, as one participant with disability explained, '*If I can't even get into the classroom, how am I meant to learn?*' This basic issue highlights the importance of ensuring that all school spaces are accessible to students with disability.

> Some schools and universities do a good job, like having ramps, extra time in exams, or teachers who understand disabilities. But others don't. They might not have enough resources or trained staff, so kids with disability don't always feel included or supported. (YPWD)

Also, the lack of resources in some schools can hinder engagement. Schools with limited funding may struggle to provide the necessary support or make reasonable changes.

Another important barrier is the lack of disability awareness among educators. Young people pointed to good teachers but felt that, on the whole, teachers often failed to understand how to effectively support students with disability, which negatively affects their academic experience. As one participant pointed out

> I wish that more lecturers knew how to engage with a disabled person. (YPWD).

Some suggested more flexible school days while others valued universities granting extensions when students needed more support.

> In a learning institution I would like to see more education to the lecturers around disability and inclusion so they can provide the best learning pathway to their students (disabled or not). I also believe that moving from full-time to part time study and applying for part-time study shouldn't be as much of a hassle as it really is. (YPWD)

Without proper training, teachers may isolate students or overlook their needs without meaning to. This can make students feel unsupported and disengaged from their learning.

4.3 Bullying

Bullying and harassment are also problems in schools. Many young people with disability reported being bullied, which they and other participants felt was due to negative attitudes and misconceptions about disability.

> I think it comes from like to some extent like kids kind of being malicious and seeing those with disabilities sort of like an easy target to pick on and bully. And also, that kids do tend to just believe those who like deviate from the norm. (YL)

One participant was frustrated with their school’s response to bullying.

> I know my old school had a horrendous support system. If you went to one of the teachers to talk about, if you're getting bullied. A lot of them would actually turn a blind eye to the bullying and just ignore you or … if you were getting like physically assaulted or verbally assaulted, they would just ignore it and go walk off. (YC-YPWD)

Some schools fail to manage bullying. Ongoing bullying further isolates students with disability. Another participant with disability highlighted the need for immediate action, saying, ‘*the most important thing, is just dealing with [bullying] in the first place, like stopping it from happening*’.

Some participants felt that students would benefit from more education about disability and saw this as a step in building understanding and empathy. Others felt that it would be good to have days on which disability might be celebrated. This, they believed, might be complemented with peer support.

> Also, I’d create a buddy system where students with disabilities have someone they can go to for help or just to talk. (YPWD)

4.4 Benefits of mainstream and specialist schools and units

There were mixed views on the value of mainstream versus specialist schools. On one hand, some participants felt that specialist units allowed for more focused support. On the other hand, others observed that these units often lead to isolation.

> I believe that everyone should have the right to learn, and if these kids are in the disability hub their learning experience is very limited due to what people see and not what disabled students are capable of… [If I was in charge] I would create a campaign to support students with disabilities integrate into mainstream classrooms… I also believe that every teacher in this school I work in should learn what disability is and how they can include disabled kids in their classroom.
> (YPWD)

This reflects a belief that inclusion in mainstream classrooms offers more opportunities for social interaction and learning alongside a diverse group of peers. However, others felt that specialist schools provided better support for students who struggle with the demands of mainstream education or need more personal support or adjustments.

5. Inclusion and access to social opportunities

Young people in all groups were asked about social inclusion. They were asked what helped and hindered young people with disability’s friendships, involvement in social events and broad social inclusion. They said that it was important that they had opportunities to engage with their communities outside family and school. They valued having friends and feeling like they belonged and chances to feel like they contribute like their peers without disability.

> What helps people with disability feel good about themselves, having a good support group of friends. (YPWD)
>
> [What makes you feel included?] being invited, being invited… to make friends and join social events and support that meets their needs and wants to be clear minimum standards of support so that young people with disabilities can form their expectations accordingly. (YPWD)

For many, the chance to connect with others who share similar experiences was deeply valuable. Several participants emphasised how being with peers who understand their challenges gave them a sense of belonging and validation.

As one participant with disability said, ‘I interact with others in the disability community because we get each other. There’s a level of understanding that makes a huge difference’. Another shared this sentiment, noting that ‘there's a real difference in the energy it takes to engage with people who understand my experiences’.

> I think that social groups aimed at people with disability do really well. One autism specific, one I quite like, is different journeys, who do monthly dinners where they will rent out a room in like an RSL or a pub, so they can have a sensory friendly space, and we can all do a big social dinner together with lots of different tables, so you can meet new people or sit with people who you're familiar with and catch up every month. … And so that's a great way to not worry about masking because everyone there is also disabled, and you can play a board game or dungeons and dragons, and it's a lot of fun. And I think that's good for building self-esteem and community. (YPWD)

Spending time with peers with disability was also important as it meant not having to constantly explain yourself and feeling different from those around you. They recounted, with some sadness, that their non-disabled peers often did not understand them and were unwilling to cope with some of their disability-related behaviours.

> I think that, yeah, there's a real difference in the amount of energy it takes to engage with people who get it and get my experiences. I mean, not all the people that I interact with that are disabled would use that language for themselves, but I think there's just a level of getting it, a level of solidarity and community, which is probably why I choose to spend my time with people who I share that lived experience of disability. (YPWD)

Young people with disability reported that they face negative attitudes and stereotypes that influence their romantic relationships. There is an assumption by some that people with disability are either incapable of or uninterested in romantic relationships. This assumption contributes to social exclusion and bullying. For example, one participant described the surprise expressed when revealing an interest in romance, stating,

> I mentioned at one point to a friend, like, oh, that person was really cute, and they're like, I didn’t... their reaction to that was surprised that an autistic person would want a romantic relationship. (YPWD)

Young people with disability said that these attitudes undermine their independence and capacity to form meaningful relationships. They also add to feelings of isolation and self-doubt. The problem is not only social but internal, with many young people with disability struggling with the stigma and assumptions about their worth as intimate partners.

5.1 Enablers

Young people with disability listed some of the things they need to access mainstream social events. For those with mobility issues, having ramps and parking spaces close to the venue is essential. Those with autism talked about the need to have designated quiet and low-stimuli spaces available so that they might ‘decompress’. Young people also said that before going to events, they needed information about what adjustments were in place.

> For example, already having a sensory space, or, like, having information on the event page about accessibility, or a bit of, yeah, and having those, sort of having a contact person to actually voice your needs to. And I think there are ways like that that people can, or events can signal that it's Oh, like that they're welcoming us asking for what we need. (YPWD)

Young people with disability felt that being at community events and participating in social activities were easier with peers, family or support workers.

> I think having a good group of friends who support you for social events is important if you're feeling anxious to attend or having a support worker. (YPWD)

These people knew them well and were aware of how safe and comfortable they felt.

> So, for me, I get overwhelmed in social events, so my friends support me with that, like, if I need, like, a break from the people in the environment, and guess what that meets the needs and wants is just like awareness of the disability. (YPWD)

5.2 Barriers

Despite these supports, participants also noted significant barriers to engaging with broader social activities. Fear of being judged for not participating ‘properly’ in group settings was a common concern. Also, parents and teachers being overprotective of was seen as a barrier.

> Sometimes others try to protect me too much, and it stops me from doing what I want to. (YPWD).

However, some young people said that their parents’ lack of willingness to acknowledge their disability sometimes made it difficult for them to get the help they needed to actively engage in their communities.

> One thing I would add is I think stereotypes have been a huge thing that have stopped, that have been a barrier to me getting a diagnosis, whether that's my parents [not wanting] ... to acknowledge things, wanting their perfect child again. [Not acknowledging my disability] means that there are no supports for me getting out and about. (YPWD)

Some young people with disability also reported that friends’ and peers’ lack of understanding about disability often meant that they were excluded from activities when their friends did not know how to support them. One young woman who had an issue with her digestive system, for example, said that after her friends found out that she was not able to eat in ways like them they stopped asking her to go out with them to cafes or restaurants.

> I am technically nil by mouth, I don't eat. So, people then go, oh, I'm not even going to invite you out ... So, then it's kind of like the isolation, because people assume you're better, not asking because it could be hurtful, because you can't eat so you can't go out, like they assume what I can and can't do, which bothers me immensely. (YPWD)

The inaccessibility of social spaces was another major problem. Many young people pointed out that physical barriers, such as the lack of ramps or sensory accommodations, made it difficult for them to participate fully in community activities. As one participant reflected,

> Accessible spaces are key. Without them, it's nearly impossible to be included. (YPWD)

6. Employment: Enablers and barriers to engaging in employment

Young people were asked about how workplaces could better include people with disability. Given that almost all participants were aged under 21 (n=36 of 39) and reported that they were in school, they naturally had limited workplace experiences.

Participants talked about the benefits of employment for young people with disability. Many believed that inclusion policies had meant that many workplaces were more committed to diversity. Some also noted that many employers had put in place ways to provide opportunities to people with disability. Young people with disability shared experiences of when employers had seen the value in them and had offered work.

> So, I don't have a have a job at the moment, but even with my disability I've had people say they'd love to give me a job. (YPWD)

They felt that greater access to employment was made possible due to changes in community attitudes and employers' increased willingness to meet needs.

However, this was not everyone's experience. Some participants said that young people with disability may still come up against assumptions and judgments that would affect their ability to find work and to be treated well.

> I've noticed in the workplace and everything as well, where people just kind of assume what you can and can't do. (YPWD)
>
> Young people may struggle to find employment due to misunderstandings with stereotypes. (YPWD)

In one group, a young carer shared how her sister's disability sometimes led to her shouting or making strange noises. While a local business had taken on her sister for work experience, her employment did not last when customers found her behaviours upsetting and made complaints.

> And they said she was too noisy to work and it was like, what do you mean? Just too noisy? Like she's doing the job. Like come on now (YC)

Others agreed with her and felt that despite employers having reasonable adjustments in place, employment is still hard when the public do not have empathy or understanding.

7. What would it take to improve the experiences (and outcomes) of young people with disability?

Young people in all groups were asked about ways that inclusion and outcomes for people with disability might be improved. Young people with disability provided first-hand accounts, while other participants talked about ways that their peers and the broader community might be helped to challenge assumptions and be more inclusive.

7.1 Adopting social models of disability

To improve the experiences and outcomes of young people with disability, many participants suggested moving away from the medical model of disability and using a social model instead. One participant noted the importance of moving to a strength-based approach.

> For me, what has helped um a lot is having access to good information, particularly like strength based like moving away from that as mentioned, like the medical model and moving towards, like a social model around disability, and also hearing from people with lived experience. (YPWD)

They believed this change is essential because it lets young people with disability see themselves as people with unique identities and experiences, rather than a problem that needs to be fixed. Using a social model of disability puts the focus on removing barriers and changing social attitudes, rather than trying to ‘fix’ individuals to fit a narrow, able-bodied view.

> I'm not a problem that needs to be fixed. And so, like being able to acknowledge that I'm not the problem. ... And I think once being able to realise that and whatnot. It was helpful in making me feel less like of a burden to everyone and everything. (YPWD)

They said that adopting a social model also helps young people with disability see themselves differently within society. They believed that disability pride is very important in reducing feelings of being a burden and helping young people feel less isolated and stronger.

7.2 Resisting negative stereotypes

Participants felt that pushing back against negative attitudes towards disability is a powerful way to challenge stereotypes and improve inclusion. They believed that young people with disability and their allies play a key role in changing harmful misconceptions.

> I think that some of the ways it affects people with disability, … but we have to push back against these stereotypes, especially if you have a visible disability or a disability that in the setting that you're in, you won't be able to not disclose for whatever reason, you're immediately having to fight an assumption a person already has about you. (YPWD)

Resistance means fighting negative views and educating others, particularly when disability is visible or obvious. By speaking up directly, sharing lived experiences, and challenging assumptions, people with disability can help people see disability as a part of human diversity, not something to be pitied or feared.

7.3 Making the community more accessible

Young people with disability face many challenges in accessing community spaces and services as they often lack the structures, resources, and support systems to accommodate their needs.

Many young people feel that society as a whole is not designed for their needs.

> The world isn’t designed to support me. (YPWD)

While there are communication methods like Auslan, there is an overall lack of awareness, willingness or effort to make environments more inclusive or accessible. This limits participation by young people with disability in everyday activities.

7.4 Increasing services that are adequate and responsive to the needs of individuals and their families

Young people with disability and young carers said it is important to develop better and more responsive support services that fit their individual needs and the needs of their families. Young people with disability and carers said that their capacity to engage with school, university, social activities, and employment was limited when supports couldn’t meet their daily needs.

Young people with disability and their families also said that they need to be able to easily get information about their rights, supports, and how to access them. When asked what would most help them feel included, one participant pointed to ‘*accessible information for accessing support services … availability of services focusing on the individual and their experiences.*’

They also said it was important to make information available in different formats to help those with different needs. This means providing information in different ways, like easy-read documents, audio formats, or digital formats.

It is also important to make support more flexible and individual. Services should move away from a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach and instead offer tailored solutions that take into account the specific needs of the individual.

Making disability services more accessible and flexible is especially important for those provided through government programs like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Simplifying processes, reducing red tape, and providing support that is available and suited to individual needs would make services much more accessible. Services should be planned with people with disability, to make them responsive to their unique challenges and preferences.

A number of participants highlighted the importance of providing comprehensive family support for young people with disability. They noted the major emotional and financial strain on caregivers. One participant described the problems faced by caregivers, saying, '*caring can be a big load.*' Others spoke about the need for more tailored support services that include the individual with disability as well as their family. Families, especially those with young carers, often juggle many tasks. This can be overwhelming, especially when young carers have to do things normally done by parents.

Finally, setting up peer support networks for individuals with disability and their families can support a sense of community and belonging and offer practical advice. These networks can provide important emotional support, shared experiences, and a base for advocacy, leading to greater inclusion and quality of life.

7.5 Improving Systems

A key issue is the that systems such as the NDIS that are meant to provide support are often complicated and inflexible. The lack of adequate support, combined with red tape, often leaves individuals feeling unsupported and tired. Many have to use expensive services or go without the help they need.

The problems faced by young people with disability in navigating systems such as education, healthcare, or public services are worsened by costs, long waitlists, and a lack of information. As one participant said, '*The complexity of systems … lack of information, and financial barriers*' can leave young people feeling trapped in disadvantage, unable to get the services and supports they need.

> … when you're already working with a disadvantage, having that added burden of a hard system to work with, or someone being just hard to or. Yeah, not adaptable. Then it increases the toll. It increases the load that you [have] to carry. (YPWD)

Young people said that building an inclusive community required reducing these barriers by making public spaces, education, and support services more accessible. This involves not only changing physical spaces but also making sure that systems like the NDIS are responsive and user-friendly. The whole community needs to commit to disability awareness and inclusion and a culture of understanding and adaptability to make sure that young people with disability can fully participate in and contribute to society.

7.6 Independent decision-making

Young people with disability argued strongly for the opportunity to take more control of their lives. As noted above, people with disability are not always given choices. Participants reported that doctors, school staff and other workers often asked their parents or carers to make important decisions that people with disability should be allowed to make themselves.

> Maybe to help people with disabilities feel better by themselves, let them talk more like let them speak their voice and advocate more ... Basically just have people that listen to them and listen to needs and wants to, don't try and advocate on behalf of them if they don't want them to (YPWD)
>
> And then it's about like respecting autonomy and also asking people, like people are able to make their own choices, disabled or not, let them, don't take away choice, freedom and all of that. So let me make the choices that affect me. Don't try to make them for me, because otherwise, then it's very isolating and also reductionist again. (YPWD)

One participant gave the following advice to young carers and paid carers.

> When it comes to working with or yeah, being around people with disabilities or any impairments, making sure that you're conscious of how that disability may inhibit their activity but also ... not taking away their autonomy when you're trying to support them as well ... Like whatever they can do for themselves, like they ... have the opportunity to do it. But if they do need support, being there to give a hand and not like control their movement. (CALD)

7.7 Engagement and co-design

Young people with disability wanted to be able make personal decisions and influence how settings and institutions could be more inclusive and supportive. They also wanted to be able to inform how communities could become more inclusive and supportive. Young people felt that ways to increase community engagement and to improve the lives of people with disability needed to be driven by the needs and wishes of those with lived experience.

> They take the time to either co design or just know what would be useful for people with disabilities in any particular situation or event that they're planning out that. That makes me feel good when I see that happen, when people put in effort. I think having a specific place or program to meet people, either you know, focused around disability or not, is good. (YPWD)

> … the actual problem of inaccessibility is about the world around me, not about anything inherently about me. So, I think just like accessible spaces, I think that disabled people making decisions about things. So, whether that's me making decisions about myself, or like disabled people being the ones that are just like doing things in the world, and then, because of that, it's more accessible for me because there's someone else with shared experience who's influenced it. (YPWD)

Young people with disability said that because programs such as the NDIS were developed by adults and people without disability, things that young people valued were not offered. This made them very frustrated, with many asking for more responsive guidelines.

> For example, the NDIS I get funding for things I don't want and can't get funding for the things that would be most helpful for me. Yet, the whole idea is that my budget is based on my goals and my choice. (YPWD)
>
> 100% with the things, with the NDIS, I've had the same experience where they've given me things that I didn't ask for, didn't want, and I explained that they were not accessible, and everything that I asked for, and within reason, they knocked all of that back. So, I guess they like essentially gave me no support with that, whilst also making the entire process extremely difficult and draining. I um, there's just not outside of that. The other options are just expensive, and good services are over saturated, and so you're left with, like, either going to something else, and potentially, you know, traumatising yourself again, or just going without. (YPWD)

7.8 Providing feedback

Young people felt that it is very important for young people with disability to be able to shape the ways that organisations and communities support people with disability. They asked for these organisations to seek feedback.

> I would also create and deliver regular surveys to the student population (those with disability) to ask for their specific feedback. If we don't ask for this feedback, we can't be certain we are truly meeting the needs of those with disabilities. (YPWD)
>
> By providing regular surveys to ask for feedback from students with disability, this would give me strong reference points as to whether the campaign is working well and what could be done differently. Hearing directly from the voices of those with disabilities is crucial if we are to look at making change. (YPWD)

8. Creating a campaign to improve inclusion

Young people with and without disability were asked what types of campaigns might deal with the false assumptions and prejudice and promote inclusion. They proposed several ideas based on their own experiences and knowing the different groups that need to be reached, including young people, rural and remote communities, and people from CALD backgrounds.

8.1 Social media campaigns

Social media was seen as a powerful tool for raising awareness and changing attitudes, especially among young people. Participants highlighted the importance of social media campaigns as they reach a large audience quickly. As one participant with disability put it, '*I would run social media campaigns. Most people are on social media, so the target reach would be large*'. This type of campaign could tell real stories from people with disability, aiming to highlight shared experiences and challenge misconceptions in an interesting way. The use of platforms like Instagram and TikTok was suggested for their wide appeal and accessibility to young people.

8.2 Campaigns for rural and remote areas

Participants discussed the need for special campaigns for rural and remote areas, where disability awareness may be lower and access to services more limited. As one participant with disability said, '*awareness campaign simply for rural and remote areas, just raising awareness*'. Participants thought these campaigns should aim to teach people in these regions about disabilities.

8.3 Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities

Participants said the issues faced by people with disability from CALD backgrounds, saying that culturally appropriate support is key to improving inclusion. One participant with disability suggested '*supporting young people living with disabilities and from CALD backgrounds to find a support worker who is of a similar background or can relate to them*'. Campaigns aimed at CALD communities could involve 'cultural competence' training for service providers and making people with disability more visible within these communities. This would help to address the complex issues young people face in dealing with both disability and cultural identity.

8.4 Professional training for public and private sectors

Professional development was also seen as important for making lasting change. Participants suggested that campaigns should target sectors like education, healthcare, and public transport. For example, a campaign could raise awareness about the 'sunflower lanyard' program, which allows people with disability to indicate their needs to public transport workers. This program, which started in the UK, helps people feel more comfortable accessing public spaces by showing that they may need extra time or support.

8.5 Disability awareness in schools and universities

Campaigns aimed at both students and staff in schools and universities were also discussed. One young person noted the value of including disability awareness in the curriculum and providing chances for students to volunteer with people with disability. Such campaigns could provide training for students on how to be allies, or supporters, while also creating inclusive places for people with disability to learn and socialise.

8.6 Campaigns that foster solidarity and representation

Many young people said that campaigns should raise awareness and also foster solidarity and pride among people with disability. We can help challenge prejudice by highlighting the positive contributions people with disability make to society. We can also celebrate role models who share similar backgrounds and experiences.

Seeing other young African Australians with disabilities succeeding can inspire others to aim for more. (YPWD)

These actions can empower young people with disability to feel proud of their identity and more confident in asking for what they need.

The best campaigns to improve attitudes about disability should use social media, targeting rural areas and CALD groups. The campaigns should also provide professional training, and create educational spaces that support engagement and understanding. These efforts can build a more inclusive society where young people with disability are seen, heard, and supported.

9. Discussion: Addressing attitudes towards disability and enhancing inclusion in Australia

This report highlights the important role of society's attitudes in shaping the experiences of young people with disability in Australia. Despite progress in disability rights, entrenched stereotypes, misconceptions, and physical barriers continue to limit full inclusion (Gooding et al., 2017; Ruhindwa et al., Tan et al., 2019). These attitudes not only affect how young people with disability are treated, but also limit their opportunities in education, employment, and social participation (Antonopoulos, 2024; Gooding et al., 2017; Teather & Hillman, 2017). This discussion will summarise the key findings and explore ways to foster a more inclusive society for young people with disability.

9.1 The impact of stereotypes and misconceptions

Participants argued that stereotypes about disability are everywhere and often form the basis for discriminatory attitudes. These misconceptions frame people with disability as incapable, dependent, and deserving of pity. They gave accounts of how such views contribute to exclusion and limit the opportunities available to young people with disability in different aspects of life. These negative views also lead to infantilisation, where people with disability are treated as less competent, or like children, which undermines their autonomy and self-worth (Agmon et al., 2016; Robey et al., 2006).

For example, when teachers in schools hold low expectations of students with disability, this can reduce the chances of those students reaching their full potential (Sanders, 2006; Shifrer, 2013). This is compounded by a lack of adequate support and resources in many schools. Also, the assumption that disability is a tragedy or something to be 'fixed' removes the experiences and identities of people with disability, seeing them only through a medical lens (Retief & Letšosa, 2018; Zaks, 2024). Participants argued that these attitudes directly affect how young people with disability are perceived and treated, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion.

9.2 The importance of experience

According to participants, one of the most significant factors influencing attitudes towards disability is personal experience. Young people who have interacted with people with disability, whether through family, school, or work, tend to have more inclusive and empathetic attitudes (Perenc & Peczkowski, 2018). However, young people without these interactions often rely on stereotypes, misconceptions, or the media. This highlights the importance of giving young people opportunities to engage with and learn from individuals with disability, whether through school programs, internships, or community events.

Our participants argued that increasing engagement with people with disability in real-life contexts helps take down stereotypes and promotes understanding. By engaging with the lived experiences of those with disability, young people can gain a broader perspective and challenge their own assumptions. This change in perspective is essential for creating a more inclusive society, where disability is understood as a part of human diversity, rather than something to be feared or pitied.

9.3 The role of media and social media campaigns

Media plays a powerful role in shaping public attitudes towards disability, but its impact has often been negative (Worrell, 2018). Disability is frequently portrayed as a deficit, where individuals are shown as either tragic figures or sources of inspiration due to their perceived resilience in the face of adversity (Cameron et al., 2021; Goethals et al., 2022; Holland et al., 2024). These portrayals reinforce harmful stereotypes and limit the visibility of the diverse experiences of people with disability.

However, social media offers an opportunity to counter these stereotypes. Campaigns on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter can engage large audiences, particularly younger people, and challenge negative views of disability (Cahyadi & Setiawan, 2020; Pearson & Trevisan, 2015). Social media campaigns can show real stories from individuals with disability, highlighting their achievements, struggles, and everyday experiences. These real stories help to humanise people with disability, moving the story from one of pity to one of agency and empowerment (Gelfgren et al., 2022).

In addition, social media provides a space for young people with disability to connect, share experiences, and support one another (Sweet et al., 2020). By amplifying the voices of people with disability, social media can play a key role in changing societal attitudes and fostering greater inclusion.

9.4 The importance of education and professional training

Education plays a central role in shaping attitudes towards disability, and schools are vital in either reinforcing or challenging stereotypes (Alahmari et al., 2021; Vlachou & Tsirantonaki, 2023). Young people with disability often report that their education experiences are shaped by teachers' attitudes towards disability, which can range from inclusive and supportive to dismissive and uninformed. Many teachers lack the training and resources needed to effectively support students with disability, which can lead to disengagement, lower academic achievement, and feelings of exclusion (Gesel et al., 2022; Lawrence et al., 2023).

To address these issues, there is a need for comprehensive disability awareness training for educators, staff, and students. This training should focus not only on the practical aspects of disability support, but also on fostering empathy, understanding, and inclusion. Schools should also include disability education in the curriculum, helping students to understand disability as part of human diversity (Alahmari et al., 2021). This will promote more inclusive attitudes among young people, preparing them to engage with people with disability in a respectful and supportive manner.

Schools should also ensure that students with disability receive personalised and tailored support, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. By providing flexible learning and consistent support, schools can help students with disability feel more included and supported in their academic journey.

9.5 Addressing barriers to social participation

Young people with disability face significant barriers to social inclusion. While some young people with disability have the opportunity to engage with their peers and communities, many struggle with social isolation due to physical and attitudinal barriers (Casas, 2007; Collins et al., 2022). Lack of accessible public and private spaces and services limits the participation of people with disability in social, recreational, and cultural activities.

For young people with disability, being excluded from social events or feeling isolated within their communities is often made worse by a lack of understanding from their peers. Inaccessible venues, such as those without ramps or sensory-friendly spaces, pose a significant challenge for those with mobility issues or sensory sensitivities (Neven & Ectors, 2023; Teng, 2025). Also, social attitudes, such as the assumption that people with disability cannot fully participate or contribute to social situations, often result in exclusion.

To foster a more inclusive social environment, it is essential to improve the accessibility of community spaces and events. This includes not only physical adaptations, such as ramps and accessible toilets, but also ensuring that events are sensory-friendly and provide adequate support and information for people with disability. Furthermore, fostering an inclusive culture where people with disability are seen as valuable contributors to society is crucial for improving social inclusion.

9.6 Moving towards a more inclusive society

Participants argued that we should use a social model of disability that focuses on removing barriers and promotes inclusion to improve the experiences of people with disability. The social model views disability as a result of societal limitations, rather than a flaw in the individual (Bampi et al., 2010; Bunbury, 2019). By using this model, society can begin to view people with disability not as problems to be fixed, but as individuals with unique identities and valuable contributions to make.

Young people with disability should be actively involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives (Liddiard et al., 2019). This includes co-designing strategies for community engagement, education, and disability services. By giving young people with disability a voice in shaping policies and practices, society can ensure that the needs and aspirations of this group are met in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

Australia has come a long way in making life better for young people with disability, but problems remain. Many young people with disability face unfair treatment, unhelpful attitudes, and spaces that are not built for everyone. This means it can be harder for them to do well at school, get a job, or take part in everyday activities.

Young people in this project said we need to stop thinking of disability as something ‘wrong’ and start making the world more welcoming and fairer for everyone. This means listening to people with disability, changing how we talk about disability, and making schools, workplaces, and communities more inclusive.

We want to thank the young people who took part in this research, especially those with disability, for their honesty and strength in talking about discrimination and how it feels. At the end of our focus groups, we asked them what messages they would want to share with other young people with disability across Australia. Here’s what they said:

> You’re important, and you deserve to be treated fairly. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do something. (YPWD)
>
> Do not give up in advocating for your rights. With collaboration and empowering others to advocate for inclusiveness, we can be effective! (YPWD)
>
> They are valuable people despite what others think, and hopefully one day everyone will share that opinion. (CALD)

References

Agmon, M., Sa'ar, A., & Araten-Bergman, T. (2016). The person in the disabled body: a perspective on culture and personhood from the margins. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, *15*, pp.1-11.

Alahmari, K.A., Rengaramanujam, K., Reddy, R.S., Silvian Samuel, P., Ahmad, I., Nagaraj Kakaraparthi, V., & Tedla, J.S. (2021). Effect of disability-specific education on student attitudes toward people with disabilities. *Health Education & Behavior*, *48*(4), pp. 532-539.

Antonopoulos, C. (2024). Workplace inclusion: Implicit bias, personal values, and employment of people with disability in Australia (Doctoral thesis). Charles Sturt University.

Bampi, L.N.D.S., Guilhem, D., & Alves, E.D. (2010). Social model: a new approach of the disability theme. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, *18*, pp.816-823.

Boyatzis, R. (1998). Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development. Sage.

Brooks, R. & Riele, K.T. (2013). Exploring ethical issues in youth research: An introduction. *Young*, *21*(3), 211-216. https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308813488816.

Bunbury, S. (2019). Unconscious bias and the medical model: How the social model may hold the key to transformative thinking about disability discrimination. *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, *19*(1), pp.26-47.

Cahyadi, A. & Setiawan, A. (2020). Disability and social media: exploring utilization of Instagram platform as a tool for disability advocacy. *Al-Balagh: Jurnal Dakwah Dan Komunikasi*, 5(2), pp.223-250.

Cameron, L., Knezevic, I. & Hanes, R. (2021). Inspiring people or perpetuating stereotypes?: The complicated case of disability as inspiration. In *Disability Representation in Film, TV, and Print Media*, (pp. 108-127). Routledge.

Casas, I. (2007). Social exclusion and the disabled: An accessibility approach. *The Professional Geographer*, *59*(4), pp.463-477.

Coleman, E., O'Sullivan, L., Crowley, R., Hanbidge, M., Driver, S., Kroll, T., Driver, S., Kroll, T., Kelly, A., Nichol, A., McCarthy, O., Sukumar, P., & Doran, P. (2021). Preparing accessible and understandable clinical research participant information leaflets and consent forms: A set of guidelines from an expert consensus conference. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, 7(1).

Collins, A., Rentschler, R., Williams, K., & Azmat, F. (2022). Exploring barriers to social inclusion for disabled people: Perspectives from the performing arts. *Journal of Management & Organization*, *28*(2), pp.308-328.

Egilson, S. Þ., Ólafsdóttir, L. B., Ingimarsdóttir, A. S., Haraldsdóttir, F., Jóhannsdóttir, Á., Gibson, B. E., & Hardonk, S. (2021). Life quality and participation of disabled children and young people: design and methods of a transformative study. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *20*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211016713.

Gelfgren, S., Ineland, J., & Cocq, C. (2022). Social media and disability advocacy organizations: Caught between hopes and realities. *Disability & Society*, *37*(7), pp.1085-1106.

Gesel, S.A., Foreman-Murray, L., & Gilmour, A.F. (2022). Sufficiency of teachers' access to resources and supports for students with disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *45*(3), pp.204-226.

Goethals, T., Mortelmans, D., Van den Bulck, H., Van den Heurck, W., & Van Hove, G. (2022). I am not your metaphor: Frames and counter-frames in the representation of disability. *Disability & Society*, *37*(5), pp.746-764.

Gooding, P., Anderson, J., & McVilly, K. (2017). Disability and social inclusion 'Down Under': A systematic literature review. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, *8*(2).

Holland, K., Holland, S.K., & Haegele, J.A. (2024). Inspirational and worthy of charity:(Mis) representations of disability in sport media. *Communication & Sport*, *12*(2), pp.210-229.

Jóhannsdóttir, Á., Egilson, S. Þ., & Haraldsdóttir, F. (2022). Implications of internalised ableism for the health and wellbeing of disabled young people. *Sociology of Health & Illness*, *44*(2), 360-376. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13425.

Lawrence, C.E., Carter, E.W., Lanchak, E.R., & McMillan, E.D. (2023). Educator perspectives on accessing disability-related information and resources. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *46*(4), pp.265-283.

Liddiard, K., Runswick-Cole, K., Goodley, D., Whitney, S., Vogelmann, E., & Watts, L. (2018). "I was excited by the idea of a project that focuses on those unasked questions" Co-producing disability research with disabled young people. *Children & Society*, 33(2), 154-167. https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12308.

Moore, T.P., McArthur, M., & Noble-Carr, D. (2018). More a marathon than a hurdle: towards children's informed consent in a study on safety. *Qualitative Research*, *18*(1), 88-107.

Neven, A. & Ectors, W. (2023). "I am dependent on others to get there": Mobility barriers and solutions for societal participation by persons with disabilities. *Travel Behaviour and Society*, *30*, pp.302-311.

Padgett, D.K. (2008). Qualitative methods in social work research (2nd ed.). Sage.

Pearson, C. & Trevisan, F. (2015). Disability activism in the new media ecology: Campaigning strategies in the digital era. *Disability & Society*, *30*(6), pp.924-940.

Perenc, L. & Pęczkowski, R. (2018). Cognitive and affective empathy among adolescent siblings of children with a physical disability. *Disability and Health Journal*, *11*(1), pp.43-48.

Punch, K.F. (2013). Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches. Sage.

Retief, M. & Letšosa, R. (2018). Models of disability: A brief overview. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, *74*(1).

Robey, K.L., Beckley, L., & Kirschner, M. (2006). Implicit infantilizing attitudes about disability. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, *18*(4), pp.441-453.

Ruhindwa, A., Randall, C., & Cartmel, J. (2016). Exploring the challenges experienced by people with disabilities in the employment sector in Australia: Advocating for inclusive practice-a review of literature. *Journal of Social Inclusion*, *7*(1).

Sanders, K.Y. (2006). Overprotection and lowered expectations of persons with disabilities: The unforeseen consequences. *Work*, 27(2), pp.181-188.

Shifrer, D. (2013). Stigma of a label: Educational expectations for high school students labelled with learning disabilities. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, *54*(4), pp.462-480.

Silverman, D. (2011). Interpreting qualitative data: A guide to the principles of qualitative research. Sage.

Sweet, K.S., LeBlanc, J.K., Stough, L.M., & Sweany, N.W. (2020). Community building and knowledge sharing by individuals with disabilities using social media. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *36*(1), pp.1-11.

Tan, B.S., Wilson, E., Campain, R., Murfitt, K., & Hagiliassis, N. (2019). Understanding Negative Attitudes Toward Disability to Foster Social Inclusion: An Australian Case Study. In: Halder, S., Argyropoulos, V. (eds) *Inclusion, Equity and Access for Individuals with Disabilities*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-5962-0_3.

Teather, S. & Hillman, W. (2017). The invisible students with disabilities in the Australian education system. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*, 36(6), pp.551-565.

Teng, A. (2025). A journey of creating an accessible space for inclusion and well-being. In *The Museum Accessibility Spectrum: Re-imagining Access and Inclusion*.

Vlachou, A. & Tsirantonaki, S.S. (2023). The importance of school principals' values towards the inclusive education of disabled students: Associations between their values and knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and practices. *Education Sciences*, *13*(4), p.360.

Worrell, T.R. (2018). Disability in the media: Examining stigma and identity. Lexington Books.

Zaks, Z. (2024). Changing the medical model of disability to the normalization model of disability: Clarifying the past to create a new future direction. *Disability & Society*, 39(12), pp.3233-3260.

Zheng, Q., Tian, Q., Hao, C., Gu, J., Tao, J., Liang, Z., Chen, X., Fang, J., Ruan, J., Ai, Q., & Hao, Y. (2016). Comparison of attitudes toward disability and people with disability among caregivers, the public, and people with disability: findings from a cross-sectional survey. *BMC Public Health*, *16*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3670-0.