

## POLICY BULLETIN 1, 2013



CENTRE FOR  
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**LEFT BEHIND: 2013**  
MONITORING THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG  
AUSTRALIANS WITH SELF-REPORTED LONG  
TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS, IMPAIRMENTS OR  
DISABILITIES 2001 - 2011

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MONITORING THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITH SELF REPORTED LONG TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS, IMPAIRMENTS OR DISABILITIES 2001 - 2011

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The full Technical Report is available at  
[sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/publications/](http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/publications/)

Cover Artwork:

**Riad Moujalli, *Abstract colours, watercolour***

Riad Moujalli is an artist supported by Sunshine's Community Access Program Art Studio

# INTRODUCTION

Disabled Australian adolescents and young adults are more likely to experience social exclusion than their non-disabled peers. The gap between the two actually widened between 2001 and 2011.

Social exclusion in adolescence leads to poor outcomes, such as lower educational achievement and unemployment, in adulthood. It affects not only the health and wellbeing of the individual; it also impacts on their family and the wider community. The inability of people with disabilities to participate socially and economically is a loss to the whole of society.

This report maps the extent of social inclusion or exclusion of young disabled Australians, aged between 15 and 29, over the years 2001 to 2011. It found that although the social inclusion of young disabled Australians increased on a number of key indicators, the gap between disabled and non-disabled young Australians actually increased over the 11 year period.

On 13 key indicators of social inclusion including employment, living in a jobless household, having support from family or friends in times of crisis and feeling safe, young disabled Australians are now more disadvantaged compared to their non-disabled peers than they were in 2001.

## THE FINDINGS

### In 2011

Young disabled Australians were **five times more likely** than their non-disabled peers to experience long-term unemployment and entrenched multiple disadvantage. (Entrenched multiple disadvantage is defined as experiencing disadvantage in at least three areas - income, work, education, safety and support and health - for two years or more).

Compared to their non-disabled peers, young disabled Australians in 2011 were significantly **less likely** to:

- Be employed
- Be fully engaged in education or work
- Attain Year 12 or equivalent educational qualification
- Obtain non-school qualifications
- Feel they have someone to turn to in time of crisis
- Have a voice in the community
- Have social contact with family or friends

Compared to their non-disabled peers, young disabled Australians in 2011 were significantly **more likely** to:

- Live in a jobless household
- Experience long-term unemployment
- Have lower economic resources and to experience financial stress and material deprivation
- Have mental illness
- Have fair or poor health
- Have a lower satisfaction with their life
- Feel unsafe in their local community
- Report being a victim of personal crime

### Over the past decade

Between 2001 and 2011 the gap between the inclusion of disabled and non-disabled young Australians has **widened markedly** in 13 critical areas:

- Employment
- Long-term unemployment
- Living in a jobless household
- Economic resources
- Being fully engaged in work or education
- Volunteering
- Mental illness
- Subjective well-being
- Having a voice in the community
- Support from family/friends in time of crisis
- Feeling safe
- Multiple disadvantage
- Entrenched multiple disadvantage

The gap has **narrowed** in only three areas:

- Attaining Year 12 or equivalent qualifications
- Participation in community groups
- Being a victim of personal crime

Despite social policy interventions, such as employment schemes for those in long-term unemployment and policies to include people with disabilities in community activities and organisations, the aspiration for young disabled Australians to become more socially included appears even further out of reach. Australia is a prosperous nation, committed to redressing the profound social disadvantages people with disability experience and to promoting their participation in society. But it has yet to redress the significant and pervasive social exclusion faced by Australian adolescents and young adults with a disability.

## BACKGROUND

Australia ratified the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) in 2008. This obligates the Australian Government to redress the “profound social disadvantage of persons with disabilities and promote their participation in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres with equal opportunities, in both developing and developed countries”.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this *Policy Bulletin* is to determine progress towards the equalisation of opportunity and social inclusion of young disabled Australian adults over an eleven year period leading up to, and following, Australia's ratification of UNCRPD on August 21, 2008.

The relationship between being disabled, socially excluded and poor is well known.<sup>2,3</sup> Historically, the negative social outcomes associated with disability were thought of as an inevitable consequence of health conditions or impairments. Disability is now understood to result when society excludes or discriminates against people with impairment, or creates or allows disabling environmental conditions. Examples include lack of access for people with mobility problems; no announcements on trains which exclude people who are visually impaired from using the service; poor housing and substandard working conditions. These perpetuate the social exclusion of people with health conditions or impairments.<sup>2-5</sup>

Adolescents and young adults with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to these exclusionary processes.<sup>6</sup> They are engaged in the transition to adulthood, marked in our society by educational attainment, employment, family formation and having a voice in the community. Being excluded from reaching satisfying outcomes on these markers can further entrench childhood disadvantage, thus multiplying the likelihood of socially excluded status in adulthood.<sup>6</sup>

Australian government policy is to build a stronger, fairer nation.<sup>7</sup> The *Indicator Framework for Social Inclusion*<sup>8</sup> is used to measure progress towards this goal. This tool contains 27 headline and 23 supplementary indicators. It identifies where there are significant shortfalls in achieving social inclusion.

We used Australia's *Social Indicator Framework* and all 11 waves (2001-2011) of the annual survey of *Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA)*<sup>9</sup> to determine the status of young disabled Australians (aged 15-29) in 2011 and to compare this with their status over the previous 11 years.

Details of the methods used are in an accompanying Technical Report available at <http://sydney.edu.au/health-sciences/cdrp/publications/>

*The Australian Government's social inclusion agenda aims to make sure every Australian has the capability, opportunity and resources to participate in the economy and their community while taking responsibility for shaping their own lives*  
(From *A Stronger, Fairer Australia*)

## CHANGES IN THE LEVEL OF SOCIAL INCLUSION OVER TIME FOR YOUNG DISABLED AUSTRALIANS

Between 2001 and 2011, the social inclusion of young disabled Australians **improved** on 10 of the 22 indicators (**headline indicators in bold**):

- Not living in a jobless household
- **Achieving Y12 or Certificate II at school**
- **Not experiencing low economic resources and financial stress/ material deprivation**
- Not experiencing low economic resources and financial strain
- **Having better self-rated health**
- **Feeling safe in the community**
- Not being a victim of household crime
- Not being a victim of personal crime
- **Not experiencing multiple disadvantage**
- Not experiencing entrenched multiple disadvantage.

Multiple disadvantage is defined as experiencing disadvantage in at least three of the following areas: income, work, education, safety and support.

The social inclusion of young disabled Australians **declined** on two of the 22 indicators:

- Volunteering
- **Having less contact with family and friends in the past week**

At the same time, social inclusion of their non-disabled Australian peers also increased on 14 of the 22 indicators and decreased on 2. Therefore we need to examine changes in **relative** social inclusion over time.

## DID THE GAP IN SOCIAL INCLUSION BETWEEN DISABLED AND NON-DISABLED YOUNG AUSTRALIANS NARROW OR WIDEN BETWEEN 2001 AND 2011?

The **gap in social inclusion** between disabled and non-disabled young Australians **widened** on 13 indicators, including 8 of the 12 headline indicators:

- **Being employed**
- Living in a jobless household
- Being long-term unemployed
- **Being fully engaged in work or education**
- Volunteering
- **Having low economic resources and financial stress**
- **Having mental illness**
- Having lower subjective well-being
- **Having someone to turn to in times of crisis**

- **Having a voice in the community**
- **Feeling safe in the community**
- **Multiple disadvantage**
- Entrenched multiple disadvantage

The gap **narrowed** on only 3 indicators including 2 of the 12 headline indicators:

- **Attaining Y12 qualifications**
- **Being a member of a community organization**
- Being a victim of personal crime.

The scorecard at the end summarises Australia's progress in promoting the social inclusion of young Australians with disabilities between 2001 and 2011.

## CONCLUSIONS

On some indicators, social inclusion for young disabled Australians improved over the years 2001 to 2011. However, there is a widening gap between their life conditions and those of their non-disabled peers on eight of the twelve headline indicators. This is despite social policy interventions such as employment schemes for people in long-term unemployment, income support benefits for those experiencing financial hardship, and disability-inclusive policies in community activities and organisations.

The gap between young disabled Australians and their non-disabled peers was **wider** in 2011 than in 2001 on eight key indicators: being employed, being fully engaged in work or education; having low economic resources and financial stress; having mental illness; having someone to turn to in times of crisis; having a voice in the community; feeling safe in the community; and multiple disadvantage.

The gap was **narrower** on only two of the headline indicators: attaining Y12 qualifications and being a member of a community organisation.

It should be noted that the narrowing of the gap on being a member of a community organisation resulted from rapid decline among non-disabled young Australians, rather than any evidence of increasing social inclusion among their disabled peers.

The analysis presented here builds on our previous work<sup>10</sup> to confirm that this economically prosperous nation has yet to redress the significant and pervasive social exclusion faced by Australian adolescents and young adults with a self-reported long term health condition, disability or impairment.

This study utilized the social indicators framework developed by the Australian Social Inclusion Board. We aligned indicators with items in HILDA, a robust national longitudinal panel survey of Australian households. This framework provides a useful tool to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of policy and service initiatives introduced under the social inclusion program to progress toward a stronger and fairer Australia. The framework also offers an approach to monitor Australia's progress toward meeting the nation's obligations under the UNCRPD.



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## STATEMENT OF ISSUE

Young disabled Australians are five times more likely than their non-disabled peers to experience long-term employment and entrenched multiple disadvantage. Entrenched multiple disadvantage means disadvantage in three or more areas, in income, work, education, safety, support and health, for two consecutive years.

Many studies world-wide have identified a common set of drivers of social exclusion. These include poverty, low income and income inequality, lack of access to the job market, poor educational outcomes, poor health and wellbeing, lack of access to social supports and networks, exclusion from services and discrimination. These play out in the lives of young disabled Australians at the critical point in their lives when they emerge into adulthood. As noted in *A Stronger, Fairer Australia* report: “These drivers are often inter-related. When they combine, they can have a compounding effect, deepening disadvantage and creating a vicious cycle that undermines people’s resilience and reduces their ability to participate” (p. 5).

Australia’s social policies are improving the lives of young disabled Australians, as seen in the trend to increased social inclusion between 2001 and 2011. However, this improvement is not effective enough to narrow the gap between young disabled Australians and their peers. On a number of critical markers of adulthood – being employed, being fully engaged in work or education, having someone to turn to in times of crisis, having a voice in the community, and feeling safe in the community – the gap has widened.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Five social policies that would tackle this widening gap are:

- Increase training and educational opportunities for disabled adolescents to improve the likelihood of full-time work, a known driver of improved economic resources and less financial stress
- Require funded services to report on implementing evidence-based strategies to reduce the social isolation of young disabled people in the community and a corresponding increase in their having someone to turn to in times of crisis
- Provide increased support to disabled people’s organisations to engage with young disabled Australians and promote their voice and participation in the community
- The use of tax transfers/welfare benefits to reduce the exposure to poverty among families supporting a disabled adolescent
- Ensuring that disability support services are provided to all people with a disability, rather than the minority of people who have ‘permanent’ disability as per the draft NDIS legislation

## A SCORECARD OF AUSTRALIA'S PROGRESS IN PROMOTING THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF YOUNG AUSTRALIANS WITH DISABILITIES: 2001-2011

Social Inclusion Domain	Indicator (Shaded Cells = Headline Indicator)	D	ND	Gap
<b>Work</b>	1. Employment rate			↑
	2. Jobless households	✓	✓	↑
	3. Long-term unemployment		✓	↑
<b>Learn</b>	4. Young people fully engaged in education or work			↑
	5. Year 12 or equivalent attainment	✓		↓
<b>Engage</b>	6. Contacted family/friends	✗	✗	
	7. Participation in community groups		✗	↓
<b>Engage</b>	8. Got together socially with family or friends			
	9. Voluntary work	✗		↑
<b>Material &amp; Economic Resources</b>	10. Low economic resources and financial stress/ material deprivation	✓	✓	↑
	11. Financial stress/material deprivation	✓	✓	
<b>Health</b>	12. People with mental illness		✓	↑
	13. Self-assessed health	✓	✓	
	14. Subjective quality of life		✓	↑
<b>Education &amp; Skills</b>	15. Non-school qualifications		✓	
<b>Social Resources</b>	16. Support from family/friends in time of crisis		✓	↑
	17. Autonomy—having a voice in the community		✓	↑
<b>Personal Safety</b>	18. Feelings of safety	✓	✓	↑
	19. Victim of personal crime	✓		↓
	20. Victim of household crime	✓	✓	
<b>Multiple &amp; entrenched disadvantage</b>	21. Multiple disadvantage	✓	✓	↑
	22. Multiple disadvantage (excluding health)	✓	✓	↑
	23. Entrenched multiple disadvantage	✓	✓	↑
	24. Entrenched Multiple disadvantage (excluding health)		✓	↑

✓ marked progress    ✗ marked deterioration    ↑ gap increased    ↓ gap decreased

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