



Mental Health
Australia

DISABILITY SUPPORT AND MENTAL HEALTH



People with disability are exposed to risk factors which increase the likelihood of experiencing mental ill-health including discrimination, social isolation, lack of employment opportunities, and financial difficulty.

In addition, people with mental health conditions can also experience psychosocial disability. The National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum describes psychosocial disability as “disability experience, impairments and participation restrictions related to mental health conditions which some mental health consumers and families and carers must manage.”

Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support services are recovery-oriented services which support people experiencing mental illness to manage daily activities, rebuild and maintain connections, participate in education and employment, live well in their community and work towards their goals and aspirations. Governments should ensure all people who have psychosocial needs receive adequate psychosocial support. However, the Productivity Commission Inquiry

into Mental Health found that under current policy settings, an estimated 154,000 people are not able to access the psychosocial support services they require.

Income Support

Australia’s social support system should provide a pathway to work for those who can, and realistic and fair support for people when they cannot. As a fundamental component of Australia’s social security system, the Disability Support Pension (DSP) should ensure that any Australian experiencing impacts of a disability which prevent them from employment, has the means to live a dignified and contributing life in our community.

This is particularly important for people with psychosocial disability, which is often associated with severe functional impacts, and makes up the largest proportion of people receiving the DSP. People with psychosocial disability face high costs of living associated with health costs to manage psychosocial and other health conditions, as well as discrimination in seeking employment and income insurance.

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Employment Support

While there has been a slight increase in the proportion of people with psychosocial disability working full-time, employment rates for people with psychosocial disability in Australia remain very poor. Only one-third of people with psychosocial disability are in the labour force compared to two-thirds of people with other disabilities. Further, nearly 8% of people with psychosocial disability are unemployed compared to 4.5% of people with other disabilities, or 3.9% of people with no disability.

People living with psychosocial disability report experiencing being treated unfairly because of their disability as well as employment restrictions

related to their disability. These barriers to meaningful employment limit the opportunities of people with psychosocial disability to contribute to society and the economy, and deny people the personal wellbeing benefits of employment.

Australia's current Disability Employment Services model is difficult to navigate, relies on a one-size-fits all performance framework and does not incentivise providers to support long-term employment and career outcomes for people with disability. But it can be reformed to improve the employment rate for people with psychosocial - and other - disabilities.

How are disability support and mental health linked?

It's important that all people feel supported when it comes to mental health. [Looking after your mental health while living with a disability \(beyondblue.org.au\)](https://beyondblue.org.au)

People with a disability experiencing mental ill-health, including people living with psychosocial disability, deserve the same opportunities as everybody else in the community. We know that stable housing, access to quality health services, financial security and employment are key factors that can support people to maintain their wellbeing and connection to their community. However, for many Australians living with disability, these fundamentals can remain an ideal rather than a reality.

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WHAT CAN THE GOVERNMENT DO?

In addition to the issues outlined in Mental Health Australia's separate paper on the NDIS and mental health, governments could also improve the mental health of people with disability by addressing three critical issues: expanding psychosocial supports to match need, improving income support and improving employment support.

Expand Psychosocial support to match need

The Australian Government from time to time has provided very short term funding to assist psychosocial services to continue to operate outside the NDIS, but even the recent National Agreement on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention falls short of providing a commitment to expand services to match need. It's time for the Australian Government to implement the Productivity Commission's recommendations around psychosocial services and expand psychosocial support to match need.

Improve income support

Mental Health Australia has called on the Australian Government to implement the recommendations of previous inquiries to improve income support for people with disability, including providing support to complete applications, increasing the number of hours (DSP) recipients can work without losing eligibility, and independent review and regular indexation to keep payment rates in line with reasonable costs of living.

Improve disability employment support

Australia's Disability Employment Services program is being reviewed. Mental Health Australia calls on the Australia Government to develop a future disability employment support model which:

- has a funding and performance framework that supports person-centred supports and better supports participants with complex needs
- systemically facilitates integration of employment and mental health services
- incentivises career development support and
- proactively addresses stigma and discrimination.

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LOOKING FOR MORE DETAIL OR RESOURCES?

February 2022 - Mental Health Australia Submission to Consultation on New Disability Employment Support Model
[Submission to Consultation on New Disability Employment Support Model | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

January 2022 - Mental Health Australia pre-Budget Submission - see proposed budget measure - growing psychosocial support to match need
[Mental Health Australia Pre-Budget Submission](#)

November 2021 - Submission to Joint Standing Committee inquiry into NDIS implementation and forecasting
[Submission to Joint Standing Committee inquiry into NDIS implementation and forecasting | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

August 2021 - Mental Health Australia Submission to Review of the Disability Support Pension Impairment Tables
[Submission to Review of the Disability Support Pension Impairment Tables | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

July 2021 - Mental Health Australia Submission to Senate inquiry into Purpose, Intent and Adequacy of Disability Support Pension
[Submission to Senate inquiry into Purpose, Intent and Adequacy of Disability Support Pension | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

July 2021 - Mental Health Australia Submission - Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability - Employment Issues Paper
[Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability - Employment Issues Paper | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

April 2021 - Mental Health Australia - Submission to National Disability Strategy - Consultation Stage 2-5 November 2020
[Mental Health Australia - Submission to National Disability Strategy - Consultation Stage 2-5 November 2020 | Mental Health Australia \(mhaustralia.org\)](#)

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with a Disability
<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/violence-and-abuse-people-disability-home>

October 2020 - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
[People with disability in Australia, Violence against people with disability - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

Looking after your mental health while living with a disability - Beyond Blue
[Looking after your mental health while living with a disability \(beyondblue.org.au\)](#)

The SANE Guide to reducing stigma against mental illness and suicide in the media
[SANE-Guide-to-Reducing-Stigma.pdf](#)

Mental Health Australia would like to thank its member organisations and key stakeholders for contributing to this extensive body of work on disability support and the mental health of all Australians. If you are a member of Mental Health Australia and would like to add to these resources, please contact info@mhaustralia.org

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