

Promoting Physical Activity for All Abilities

This resource is intended for use by people who have an interest in promoting physical activity for people with a disability. In particular:

- Local and State Government departments responsible for community development, sport and recreation, disability services, transport and planning
- Community health, sport, fitness and leisure organisations
- Rural Access, Metro Access and Deaf Access programs
- Primary Care Partnerships, and
- Disability Services.

This resource includes information on how to ensure a more inclusive approach is taken when promoting and developing opportunities to increase physical activity and addressing the barriers to participation in physical activity.

What is a Disability?

Disability can be defined as any limitation, restriction or impairment, which lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts every day activities¹. Types of 'disability' can include: physical, intellectual, psychiatric, mental, visual, hearing, learning disabilities, and acquired brain injury.

How many people in Australia are affected by a disability?

The *2007-2008 National Health Survey: Summary of Results* states that:

- 4.6% of the population has a disability which has profound or severe core activity limitation
- 31.5% of the population has other disability or restrictive long term health condition and
- 64% of the population has no disability or restrictive long term health condition².

It is estimated that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people profound or severe core activity limitation rates are more than double those of other Australians³.

Why focus on people with a disability?

Like the general population, there is great diversity among people with a disability. However, evidence suggests that at a population level people with a disability are at greater risk than those without disability of experiencing a range of preventable health and wellbeing issues. Included in these are conditions directly related to reduced physical activity participation such as higher rates of overweight and obesity⁴, reduced cardiovascular fitness⁵, increased risks of constipation⁶, poorer bone health as a result of reduced mobility, falls and Vitamin D deficiency^{7,8} and an increased risk of experiencing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety^{9,10}.

Despite being at greater risk of experiencing a range of health and wellbeing issues, there is also strong evidence to suggest that people with a disability face significant barriers to accessing health care services and have lower rates of participation in health promotion programs¹¹. People with a disability have been found to have demonstrably poorer access to the social and economic resources required for health, experiencing higher rates of social isolation, unemployment (9% compared with 5% for the general population) and violence; lower rates of workforce participation (53% compared with 81% in the general population) and lower average incomes¹¹.

'Go for your life' Information Centre

The Importance of Targeting People with a Disability

The rates of poor health and disability increase with age and older people experience a greater share of the burden of disease than other age groups³.

In 2008, Australia became the 28th signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³. This Convention recognises the rights of people with disabilities as citizens and the importance of 'mainstreaming' disability issues. This means that all levels and areas of government and services infrastructure need to be concerned that people with disability can access their environment. It assigns a collective responsibility for promoting opportunities to engage in life experiences, including participating in physical activity. Transportation, health and education systems, public facilities and services, information and communication technologies have a role alongside disability services³.

Physical Activity Levels Among People with a Disability

In Victoria, and Australia there is currently no comprehensive data describing the physical activity participation of people with a disability. Small scale research studies¹²⁻¹⁴ with adults with an intellectual disability living in Victoria supports the concept that this group is far less active than adults who do not have a disability. Combined, these studies show that approximately 20% have met the physical activity guidelines for adult Australians. A consistent finding was that far fewer women with an intellectual disability were sufficiently active to meet the guidelines, with less than 10% achieving the standard compared to approximately 40% of men. Additionally, among this group far less physical activity was undertaken on weekend days than on week days.

The low level of physical activity participation data among adults with an intellectual disability is in contrast to the general Victorian population that shows 62.7% of Victorian adults were sufficiently active to achieve the guidelines for physical activity¹⁵.

In other areas of health behaviour, Australian data tends to be broadly similar to that of other like countries. Evidence from countries similar to Australia has revealed that typically adults with a disability undertake less physical activity than people without a disability, and women with a disability are less active than men with a disability¹⁶.

How Much Physical Activity Is Enough? National Physical Activity Guidelines

The *Australian Adult and Older Adult Physical Activity Guidelines* recommends completing at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity (slight but noticeable difference in breathing) physical activity on most, preferably all days of the week¹⁷. Older adults should participate in strength training.

Currently there are no specific physical activity guidelines for people with a disability in Australia. The U.S Physical Activity Guidelines for Adults with Disabilities could be used for comparison.

2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans
<http://www.health.gov/PAGuidelines/pdf/paguide.pdf>

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Community Strategies

Social inclusion is achieved when all members of a community have the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life/activities. Planning for social inclusion must therefore take into account the full range of resources and services in communities that impact on access and participation opportunities for people with a disability.

Programs

Affordable programs which are available for varied age and promote a variety of programs which focus on success and enjoyment. Develop programs utilising accessible parks and trails.

Collaborations

Develop partnerships and initiatives within communities and among agencies to provide cost-effective inclusive development and recreation programs. Programs must reflect community aspirations.

Policies

Statutory Equal Opportunities obligations should be taken into account in planning for physical activity, including the duties under the Australian Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the use of universal design principles when developing new facilities, parks, trails, public transport or greenways/open space. Local governments have a crucial role to play in creating environments and opportunities for physical activity and active living. Work with planning, transport and economic development agencies to ensure that the long-term evolution of the city and region reduces car dependence and promotes equitable access to high-quality public transport.

Facilities

Planning decisions for facilities must take account of the community's need for all types of usage. Facilities should apply the requirements of universal design for any new proposal. Adequate arrangements for maintenance of facilities within existing or associated new developments must be put in place and include appropriate access requirements. Create accessible open spaces, playground, walk ways with ramps and trails that can be used by everyone, regardless of age, gender or disability and to promote disability equality.

Challenges

Many barriers to engagement in regular physical activity exist for people with a disability. Economic issues are high (cost and lack of disposable income), inaccessible and limited transport options, inappropriate equipment, negative attitudes and perceptions, information and communication related barriers and a lack of professional knowledge and training. Limited physical access to buildings and facilities may also create barriers. Local strategies and plans should aim at promoting physical activity among people of all ages, in all social circumstances and should focus on different settings (such as neighbourhoods, health care settings, workplaces, schools and transport systems) and on making the active choice an easy choice.

Grants

More opportunities for creating supportive environments can be located on the websites below.

<http://www.dpcd.grants.vic.gov.au>

<http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/>

Resources

(click the heading to access the resource)

[Disability standards for accessible public transport](#)

[The Good Play Space Guide — "I can play too"](#)

[Universal Design](#)

[Australian Building Codes Board](#)

[Accessible Information Solutions](#)

[SCOPE](#)

[Active by design](#)

[VICSRAPID](#)

[Access for All Abilities](#)

[The Partnerships Analysis Tool — VicHealth](#)

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The following organisations were involved in developing the resource

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