Australian Government

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Bulletin 147

Disability support services: services provided under the National Disability Agreement 2017–18

Summary

While the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is expected to largely replace the current provision of services to people with disability under the National Disability Agreement (NDA), many people were still receiving support under the NDA.

In 2017–18:

About 280,000 people used services

Of the 280,000 people who used services under the NDA, over half used services that are largely expected to move to the NDIS as it rolls out (54%, or about 150,000).

The average age of service users was 37

Most service users were aged under 65 (95%), with an average age of 37. Existing service users aged 65 and over will not move to the NDIS.

The proportion of service users with an intellectual or learning disability has fallen

About 1 in 3 (37%) of services users had an intellectual or learning disability, down from almost 1 in 2 (44%) in 2013–14. The decrease in the proportion of service users with intellectual or learning disability in the last 5 years is largely the result of the transition of these service users into the NDIS.

About 3 in 4 service users were unemployed

Almost three-quarters (71%) of service users aged 15 and over who were in the labour force were unemployed.

About 2 in 3 service users had an informal carer

About two-thirds (65%) of service users had an informal carer, most often their mother (69%). About 1 in 7 (14%) of service users had an informal carer who was aged 65 and over.

About 40,000 service users transitioned to the NDIS

About 1 in 7 (14%) of NDA service users transitioned to the NDIS during the year. Many of those who transitioned had an intellectual or learning disability (67%).

Contents

1   The disability services environment

People with disability interact with every aspect of Australian life, across a multitude of social policy and program areas. Specialist disability services form 1 part of this broader system of supports and payments. This bulletin focuses on 1 area of specialist disability support—services delivered under the NDA in 2017–18.

The disability services environment is changing. Many people currently using services under the NDA will progressively transition to the NDIS as it rolls out across Australia.

The National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (DSS 2011) is the mechanism under which the principles underpinning the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN 2006) are incorporated into policies and programs in Australia. It looks beyond support provided under both the NDA and the NDIS, and covers all people with disability, irrespective of whether they need or use specialist disability services. In particular, the strategy is intended to drive improvements in access to mainstream services, to promote a more inclusive approach to the design of policies and programs, and to ensure that all people with disability can participate and fulfil their potential as equal citizens.

The National Disability Agreement

Iterations of the NDA have governed the provision of disability support services in Australia since 1991. Under the NDA, Australian, state and territory governments fund a range of services that aim to ensure that 'people with disability and their carers have an enhanced quality of life and participate as valued members of the community'.

Eligibility requirements vary between jurisdictions, and the actual service a person can receive is largely subject to the availability of services (for example, based on the number of available places in particular programs).

Services under the NDA are mainly delivered by block-funded providers, with funding allocated directly to the provider to deliver the services. Some alternative forms of funding available under the NDA include:

- individualised or self-directed funding—where funds are allocated to a provider for a particular service user
- self-managed funding—where funds are allocated directly to the service user to buy services.

Information on the use of NDA services is collected in the Disability Services National Minimum Data Set (DS NMDS) (see Box 1.1), and summary data are presented in this bulletin.

In 2017–18, about 280,000 people used disability support services under the NDA, with 54% of these (or about 150,000) using services that are largely expected to move to the NDIS over time (that is, services other than open employment) (see also Box 1.2).

Box 1.1: The Disability Services National Minimum Data Set

The DS NMDS is an annual collection and national collation of a standard set of data items on disability-support services provided under the NDA. Funded agencies collect data from service users and provide them to jurisdictions, which in turn provide them to the AIHW for national collation and reporting.

Note that, in the DS NMDS:

- service-user data are not collected for all NDA service types (see Chapter 2 for more information)

- counts of service users are estimates after the use of a statistical linkage key to account for people who received services from more than 1 service-type outlet during the 12-month period (see the data quality statement for more information)

- data for Victoria and Queensland include specialist psychiatric disability services; data for other jurisdictions do not

- data for the Northern Territory from 2012–13 onwards include Basic Community Care services; data for other jurisdictions do not

- data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the progressive introduction of the NDIS (see also Chapter 2 and Chapter 5). In particular:

  – both the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and the Western Australian Government operated NDIS trials in Western Australia from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2017. DS NMDS data includes the Western Australian Government-operated NDIS trial sites for those years as these were considered to be services provided under the NDA; whereas service users who moved to the NDIA-operated trial sites were considered to have transitioned to the NDIS from the date at which they had an approved NDIS plan. On 1 July 2017, the dual NDIS trial ceased and the Western Australian Government began administering the NDIS in Western Australia. For this reason, as at 30 June 2017, service users of the Western Australian Government-operated trial sites were considered to have transitioned to the NDIS. These service users are flagged in the resubmitted 2016–17 DS NMDS data as having transitioned to the NDIS and are excluded from the 2017–18 data

  – the Australian Capital Territory Government did not collect DS NMDS data in 2015–16 or 2016–17—so national data for these years are underestimates. Data collection was not required for 2017–18 onwards (as transition to the NDIS in this jurisdiction was completed by the end of 2016–17)

  – New South Wales completed transition to the NDIS during 2017–18 and, because of complexities associated with the transition, only 2 quarters of DS NMDS data were collected in 2017–18. However, it is likely that very few clients received NDA services only in the second half of the year, so the first 2 quarters of data are considered largely representative of the full year.

> **Box 1.1 (continued): The Disability Services National Minimum Data Set**
>
> As a result, analysing trends in DS NMDS data over time is complex; but it is expected we will continue to see decreases in the DS NMDS in the use of services that are moving to the NDIS, such as state- and territory-provided services and Australian Government-supported employment services, as the NDIS continues to roll out. Changes in the use of services not moving to the NDIS, such as open employment services, are largely related to other factors (see Box 1.2).
>
> Further information on the DS NMDS can be found on the AIHW website. This includes supplementary tables to this bulletin, data cubes, and technical information (such as data definitions and the data quality statement).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme

In July 2012, in response to the Productivity Commission's final report on the inquiry into disability care and support (Productivity Commission 2011), the Australian Government announced the introduction of the NDIS. The NDIS is expected to largely replace the provision of services under the NDA.

The NDIS provides 'reasonable and necessary supports' to help people who have a 'significant and permanent' disability. The scheme is based on an insurance model, and each individual seeking access is assessed according to a common set of criteria. Individuals who are deemed eligible receive a package of funding to purchase the supports identified in their individualised plan.

Because of the fundamental change to service provision, the NDIS is being rolled out in stages. It started in trial sites in July 2013, before progressively moving to the full scheme from 1 July 2016, except in Western Australia where the state-wide roll-out of the NDIS began 1 July 2018. The details of introduction in each jurisdiction are set out in bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and the individual state and territory governments. More information on the roll-out of the NDIS can be found in these agreements, and on the NDIS website (NDIA 2019a, 2019b).

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)—an independent statutory agency whose role is to implement the NDIS—collects data on the NDIS, and publishes online quarterly reports.

Transition of NDA service users to the NDIS

Most existing NDA service users are expected to move to the NDIS over time, but not all will. Some people currently receiving services are not eligible to enter the NDIS (such as those aged 65 and over who are not already participants). Further, while some specialist disability support services will be rolled into the NDIS, others will continue to operate outside the NDIS once the NDIS is fully rolled out (see Box 1.2).

> **Box 1.2: Open employment services**
>
> To provide data that better align with the types of services and service users shifting to the NDIS over time, selected tables in this bulletin and in the supplementary tables exclude service users who only used open employment services (see, for example, tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, and supplementary tables S3.1–S3.5).
>
> Open employment services (Disability Employment Services), which are provided under the NDA and collected as part of the DS NMDS, will not be rolled into the NDIS.
>
> Much of the increase in open employment services in recent years is related to changes in income support policy over that time—for example, changes to compulsory work-focused activities aimed at helping Disability Support Pension recipients find work. Unlike most other NDA services, open employment services are demand-driven, meaning places are not capped, and anyone who meets the eligibility criteria can access them.

For the purposes of the DS NMDS, once a service user has an approved NDIS plan and funding is available through the NDIA, they are considered to have transitioned to the NDIS and are no longer reported in the DS NMDS from the date of their transition. This includes service users receiving some component of their services from jurisdictions as cash contributions (that is, full funding responsibility transfers to the NDIA) or in-kind contributions (that is, funding and contract management responsibility remains with jurisdictions in the short- to medium-term). Service users may also use NDA services in addition to those provided by the NDIS. As a result, it is possible for a NDIS participant to still be receiving a component of their services from jurisdictions after they have been exited from the DS NMDS.

Data from the DS NMDS show that just over 40,000 NDA service users transitioned to the NDIS during 2017–18 (Table 5.1; supplementary tables S4.1–S4.5). This is in addition to the roughly 42,300 service users who transitioned between 2013–14 and 2016–17.

2   Services provided under the NDA

Service type outlets

Agencies that deliver NDA services collect data against each 'service type outlet' they operate. A service type outlet is a statistical counting unit managed by an agency that delivers 1 type of NDA service from a discrete location (see also AIHW 2016 and Chapter 2). An agency may provide 1 or more NDA service types, and may therefore collect data for 1 or more service type outlets.

In 2017–18, the majority (86%) of service type outlets were in the non-government sector, and most of these were income tax exempt (for example community service-based not-for-profit organisations) (68% of all service type outlets) (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Disability support service type outlets, service group by agency sector, 2017–18 (number)

Service group	Government			Non-government			Total
	Australian/ state/territory	Local	Subtotal	Income tax exempt	Non-income tax exempt	Subtotal	
Accommodation support	1,161	22	1,183	3,843	654	4,497	5,680
Community support	487	18	505	1,617	263	1,880	2,385
Community access	38	25	63	2,138	402	2,540	2,603
Respite	85	28	113	1,188	322	1,510	1,623
Open employment	—	—	—	466	944	1,410	1,410
Supported employment	1	4	5	258	4	262	267
Advocacy, information, alternative forms of communication	4	—	4	179	37	216	220
Other support	16	54	70	55	21	76	146
Total	**1,792**	**151**	**1,943**	**9,744**	**2,647**	**12,391**	**14,334**
Total (%)	**12.5**	**1.1**	**13.6**	**68.0**	**18.5**	**86.4**	**100.0**
Total (excluding open employment)	*1,792*	*151*	*1,943*	*9,278*	*1,703*	*10,981*	*12,924*

Types of services provided

Under the NDA, the Australian Government is responsible for the provision of employment services for people with disability, and the states and territories for the provision of all other services. In 2017–18, half (50%) of service users accessed state or territory-provided services (about 141,000 service users) (Table 2.2).

The DS NMDS includes information on more than 30 individual service types, which can be grouped into broad service groups (tables 2.2 and 2.3; Supplementary table S2.34; see also AIHW 2016). A service user may use more than 1 type of service within each of these groups of services:

• Accommodation support—services that provide accommodation to people with disability, and services that provide support to enable a person with disability to remain in their existing accommodation or to move to more suitable or appropriate accommodation. About 1 in 10 (10%) of service users used this group of services, which comprises:
  – large residential/institutions (less than 1%)
  – small residential/institutions (less than 1%)
  – hostels (less than 1%)
  – group homes (4%)
  – attendant care/personal care (2%)
  – in-home accommodation support (4%)
  – alternative family placement (less than 1%)
  – other accommodation support (1%).

• Community support—services that provide the support needed for a person with disability to live in a non-institutional setting. About 1 in 3 (38%) of service users used this group of services, which comprises:
  – therapy support (10%)
  – early childhood intervention (6%)

- – behaviour/specialist intervention (2%)
- – counselling (1%)
- – regional resource and support teams (5%)
- – case management, local coordination, and development (22%)
- – other community support (1%).

- Community access—services designed to provide opportunities for people with disability to gain and use their abilities to enjoy their full potential for social independence. About 1 in 8 (13%) of service users used this group of services, which comprises:
  - – learning and life skills development (11%)
  - – recreation/holiday programs (2%)
  - – other community access (less than 1%).

- Respite—services that provide a short-term and time-limited break for families and other voluntary caregivers of people with disability to help support and maintain the primary caregiving relationship, while providing a positive experience for the person with disability. About 1 in 11 (9%) of service users used this group of services, which comprises:
  - – own-home respite (1%)
  - – centre-based respite/respite homes (3%)
  - – host family respite/peer support respite (less than 1%)
  - – flexible respite (6%)
  - – other respite (less than 1%).

- Employment services—over half (54%) of service users used this group of services, which comprises:
  - – open employment (49%)—services that provide employment assistance to people with disability in obtaining and/or retaining paid employment in the open labour market
  - – supported employment (5%)—services that provide employment opportunities and assistance to people with disability to work in specialised and supported work environments.

- Advocacy, information and alternative forms of comunication (for which service-user data are not collected), which comprise:
  - – advocacy
  - – information/referral
  - – combined information/advocacy
  - – mutual support/self-help groups
  - – alternative formats of communication.

- Other support services (for which service-user data are not collected), which comprise:
  - – research and evaluation
  - – training and development
  - – peak bodies
  - – other support services.

Table 2.2: Service users, service group by state and territory, 2017–18 (number)

Service group	NSW[a]	Vic[b]	Qld[b]	WA	SA	Tas	ACT[c]	NT[d]	Total Number	Total %
Accommodation support	4,165	7,178	5,796	4,062	5,782	1,050	—	289	28,311	10.1
Community support	19,305	44,623	11,048	15,202	10,934	3,397	—	835	105,164	37.5
Community access	6,024	10,250	8,436	5,555	4,271	819	—	279	35,626	12.7
Respite	3,781	14,276	4,312	2,673	1,116	166	—	166	26,454	9.4
Total state/territory services	*24,975*	*63,338*	*17,796*	*16,147*	*13,729*	*4,401*	*—*	*1,284*	*141,334*	*50.4*
Open employment	42,026	33,019	34,363	8,906	14,038	3,190	1,428	469	136,093	48.6
Supported employment	3,959	3,611	2,029	2,063	2,704	332	32	88	14,810	5.3
Total Australian Government services	*45,891*	*36,475*	*36,298*	*10,865*	*16,670*	*3,513*	*1,459*	*554*	*150,357*	*53.6*
Total	**69,024**	**96,599**	**52,169**	**24,910**	**28,456**	**7,733**	**1,459**	**1,756**	**280,274**	**100.0**
Total (excluding service users who only used open employment services)	*27,739*	*65,760*	*19,063*	*17,033*	*15,118*	*4,613*	*32*	*1,326*	*150,308*	*. .*

(a) New South Wales completed transition to the NDIS during 2017–18 and, because of complexities associated with the transition, only 2 quarters of DS NMDS data were collected in 2017–18. Therefore, data for 2017–18 may be an underestimate. However, it is likely that very few clients received services only in the second half of the year, so the first 2 quarters are considered largely representative of the full year.

(b) Data for Victoria and Queensland include specialist psychiatric disability services. Other jurisdictional data do not.

(c) The Australian Capital Territory Government was not required to collect DS NMDS data in 2017–18 (as transition to the NDIS in that jurisdiction was completed by the end of 2016–17).

(d) Data for the Northern Territory include Basic Community Care services. Other jurisdictional data do not.

Notes

1. Totals for Australia might not be the sum of service components because individuals may have used services in more than 1 state or territory during the 12-month period.

2. Total service users might not be the sum of service group components, because individuals may have used more than 1 service group over the 12-month period.

Table 2.3: Service users, by service group, 2013–14 to 2017–18 (number)

Service group	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	Change 2013–14 to 2017–18 (%)	Change 2016–17 to 2017–18 (%)
Accommodation support	46,177	42,580	38,948	39,022	28,311	–38.7	–27.4
Community support	142,549	149,001	149,541	142,671	105,164	–26.2	–26.3
Community access	57,493	55,172	52,030	53,812	35,626	–38.0	–33.8
Respite	39,480	38,136	38,230	38,907	26,454	–33.0	–32.0
Total state/territory services	*207,810*	*205,722*	*202,748*	*197,616*	*141,334*	*–32.0*	*–28.5*
Open employment	111,856	125,795	126,470	130,925	136,093	21.7	3.9
Supported employment	21,295	20,585	19,852	19,280	14,810	–30.5	–23.2
Total Australian Government services	*132,169*	*145,539*	*145,493*	*149,408*	*150,357*	*13.8*	*0.6*
Total	**321,531**	**333,795**	**331,817**	**331,109**	**280,274**	**–12.8**	**–15.4**
Total (excluding service users who only used open employment services)	*219,564*	*217,122*	*213,890*	*208,555*	*150,308*	*–31.5*	*–27.9*

Notes

1. Data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the staged roll-out of the NDIS. See Box 1.1 for more information.

2. Total service users might not be the sum of service group components, because individuals may have used more than 1 service group over the 12-month period.

Analysing trends in DS NMDS data over time is difficult, given the progressive transition of eligible service users and services to the NDIS since 2013–14 (see Chapter 1). The transition to the NDIS accelerated dramatically between 2016–17 and 2017–18. Between 2016–17 and 2017–18, there was a large decrease in the number of NDA services users (–28%, excluding users of open employment services only). This decrease was close to the total decrease over all the years since the transition to the NDIS began (–32% between 2013–14 and 2017–18, with only –5% occurring between 2013–14 and 2016–17).

For more information on the use of services, see supplementary tables S2.14, S2.15, S2.20, S2.25, S2.26, S2.34–S2.43, S2.46, S2.53, S2.54, S2.65–S2.67, S2.69, S2.70, S2.72, S2.73, S3.3, S4.3.

Expenditure

Australian, state and territory governments spent $6.4 billion on disability support services under the NDA in 2017–18, an average of about $20,200 per service user (Table 2.4).

Expenditure and service-user data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the introduction of the NDIS—see the *Report on government services 2019* (SCRGSP 2019) and Supplementary table S2.1 for more information on expenditure data, and Chapter 1 and Chapter 5 for more information on service users.

Table 2.4: Expenditure on disability support services, constant prices, by service group, 2013–14 to 2017–18

Service group	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	Change 2013–14 to 2017–18	Change 2016–17 to 2017–18
	Expenditure ($ million) (constant prices in 2017–18 dollars)					%	%
Accommodation support	3,726.2	3,989.8	4,119.7	3,758.5	2,859.8	–23.3	–23.9
Community support	1,326.8	1,346.9	1,426.1	1,234.2	1,006.3	–24.2	–18.5
Community access	774.7	838.4	909.0	823.3	588.0	–24.1	–28.6
Respite	456.3	484.6	502.8	457.3	325.0	–28.8	–28.9
Employment	695.4	737.6	725.2	706.0	714.0	2.7	1.1
Advocacy, information, alternative forms of communication	69.4	64.0	66.2	76.0	141.0	103.0	85.5
Other support	289.6	316.8	332.7	301.5	297.3	2.7	–1.4
Subtotal	*7,338.5*	*7,774.7*	*8,081.7*	*7,356.8*	*5,931.4*	*–19.2*	*–19.4*
Administration	512.9	515.9	548.9	467.1	505.8	–1.4	8.3
Capital grants to non-government providers	9.9	5.3	2.5	4.5	1.3	–87.0	–71.6
Total	**7,861.4**	**8,298.0**	**8,633.1**	**7,828.4**	**6,438.4**	**–18.1**	**–17.8**

continued

Table 2.4 (continued): Expenditure on disability support services, constant prices, by service group, 2013–14 to 2017–18

Service group	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	Change 2013–14 to 2017–18	Change 2016–17 to 2017–18
	Expenditure per service user (constant prices in 2017–18 dollars)					%	%
Accommodation support	100,533	107,728	111,312	100,666	106,224	5.7	5.5
Community support	9,333	9,494	10,016	9,136	10,239	9.7	12.1
Community access	15,631	16,372	17,580	15,396	16,553	5.9	7.5
Respite	12,228	13,350	13,900	12,445	13,242	8.3	6.4
Employment	5,261	5,068	4,985	4,726	4,749	–9.7	0.5
Total	**22,652**	**22,957**	**23,817**	**21,707**	**20,216**	**–10.8**	**–6.9**

Notes

1. Excludes expenditure on, and service users of, specialist psychiatric disability services.
2. Expenditure data are sourced from the Report on government services 2019 (SCRGSP 2019). In that publication, constant prices are previous years' expenditure in current year's dollars after basing expenditure on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) General Government Final Consumption Expenditure chain price deflator. Figures may not add to total because of rounding.
3. Expenditure and service-user data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the introduction of the NDIS. See SCRGSP 2019 for more information on expenditure data and Box 1.1 for more information on service users.
4. Expenditure per service user is calculated by dividing expenditure by the number of service users. Individuals might may have used more than one1 service group over the 12-month period.

Sources: SCRGSP 2019: tables 15A.3 and 15A.7; DS NMDS 2017–18.

3 Characteristics of service users

Age and sex

Most (95%) of service users were aged under 65, with an average age of 37 (tables 3.1 and 3.2). More than half (58%) were male. Male service users were generally younger than female service users, with an average age of 35 compared with 40.

The average age of service users has increased in recent years, largely as a result of the introduction of the NDIS. Children, for example, are more likely to go directly to the NDIS rather than to start using NDA services, and NDA service users who transtion to the NDIS are generally younger than other service users (see Chapter 5).

Table 3.1: Service users, by mean age and sex, 2013–14 to 2017–18

	2013–14		2014–15		2015–16		2016–17		2017–18	
Sex	Mean age (years)	%	Mean age (years)	%	Mean age (years)	%	Mean age (years)	%	Mean age (years)	%
Male	31.4	59.2	32.1	58.9	32.4	58.7	32.7	58.8	34.9	58.0
Female	37.2	40.8	37.9	41.1	38.3	41.3	38.2	41.2	40.0	42.0
Total[a]	**33.7**	**100.0**	**34.5**	**100.0**	**34.9**	**100.0**	**34.9**	**100.0**	**36.9**	**100.0**

(a) Includes service users for whom sex was 'not stated'.

Notes

1. Data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the staged roll-out of the NDIS. See Box 1.1 for more information.
2. Percentages are of the total excluding service users for whom sex was 'not stated'.

Table 3.2: Service users, sex by age group, 2017–18

Sex	0–49		50–64		65 and over		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Male	117,877	61.3	36,214	50.5	7,559	50.9	161,650	58.0
Female	74,396	38.7	35,439	49.5	7,297	49.1	117,132	42.0
Not stated	1,447	. .	38	. .	7	. .	1,492	. .
Total	**193,720**	**100.0**	**71,691**	**100.0**	**14,863**	**100.0**	**280,274**	**100.0**

Note: Percentages are of the total excluding service users for whom sex was 'not stated'.

For additional data on service users by age and sex, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.19, S2.20, S2.21, S2.23, S2.28, S2.35–S2.37, S2.62–S2.64, S2.69, S3.1, S3.2, S4.1, S4.2.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Most (94%) of service users were non-Indigenous, and 6% were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Table 3.3).

The majority (82%) of Indigenous service users were aged under 50, 17% were aged 50–64, and less than 2% were aged 65 and over (Figure 3.1; Supplementary table S2.21). Indigenous services users were generally younger than non-Indigenous service users, with an average age of 31, compared with 38 for non-Indigenous users (Supplementary table S2.20).

About 2 in 5 (39%) Indigenous service users lived in *Major cities*, compared with 2 in 3 (67%) non-Indigenous service users (Supplementary table S2.20). A further 30% lived in an *Inner regional* area (compared with 23% for non-Indigenous service users), 21% lived in an *Outer regional* area (compared with 9%), and 10% lived in a *Remote* or *Very remote* area (compared with 1%).

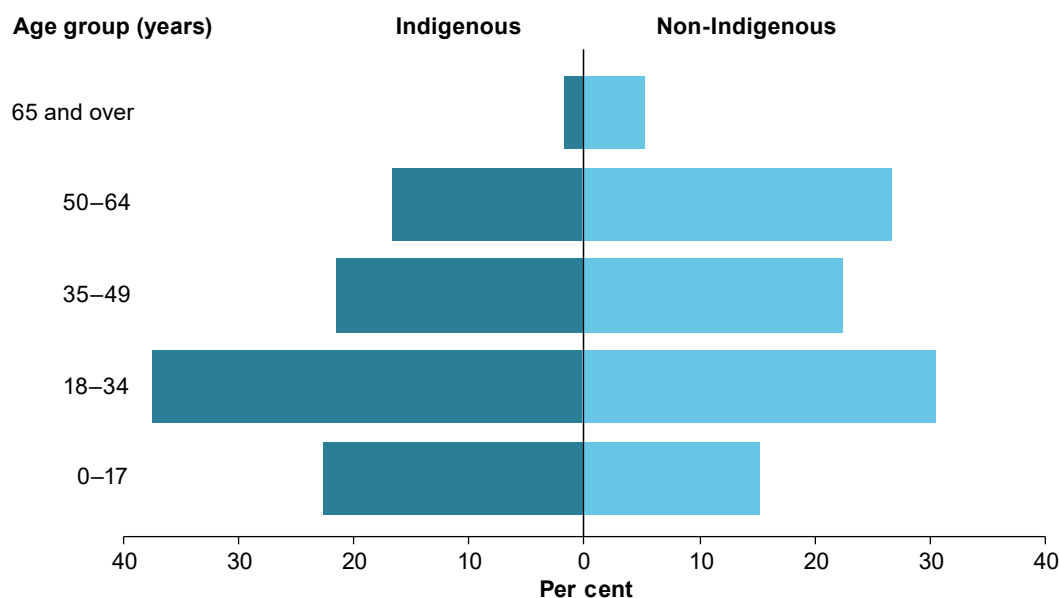### Table 3.3: Service users, by Indigenous status, 2013–14 to 2017–18

Year	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Not stated/ not collected[a]		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2013–14	18,021	5.8	291,631	94.2	11,879	. .	321,531	100.0
2014–15	19,031	5.9	302,736	94.1	12,028	. .	333,795	100.0
2015–16	19,290	6.0	300,097	94.0	12,430	. .	331,817	100.0
2016–17	19,311	6.1	298,493	93.9	13,305	. .	331,109	100.0
2017–18	15,771	5.9	252,609	94.1	11,894	. .	280,274	100.0

(a) Includes service users who only used recreation/holiday programs (service type 3.02) and who did not provide a response. This service type was not required to complete this data item.

Notes

1. Data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the staged roll-out of the NDIS. See Box 1.1 for more information.
2. Percentages are of the total excluding service users for whom Indigenous status was 'not stated/not collected'.

Figure 3.1: Service users, Indigenous status by age group (years), 2017–18

Source: DS NMDS 2017–18.

For additional data on service users by Indigenous status, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.19–S2.21, S2.43, S2.48, S2.60, S2.69, S3.1, S3.2, S4.1, S4.2.

Country of birth

The majority (84%) of service users were born in Australia, and 16% were born overseas—5% of service users in countries where English is generally spoken (EPG 1) and 11% in countries where a language other than English is predominantly spoken (EPG 2–4) (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Service users, by country of birth (English Proficiency Group countries)[a], 2013–14 to 2017–18

Year	Australia[b]		Born overseas, EPG 1		Born overseas, EPG 2–4		Not stated/ not collected[c]		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2013–14	267,189	86.7	12,575	4.1	28,471	9.2	13,296	. .	321,531	100.0
2014–15	275,774	85.9	14,006	4.4	31,224	9.7	12,791	. .	333,795	100.0
2015–16	273,781	85.9	13,920	4.4	30,946	9.7	13,170	. .	331,817	100.0
2016–17	273,237	85.9	13,705	4.3	31,124	9.8	13,043	. .	331,109	100.0
2017–18	228,108	84.5	12,778	4.7	29,109	10.8	10,279	. .	280,274	100.0

(a) 'English Proficiency Group' is a way of categorising countries based on how well English is generally spoken. (Being from a predominantly non-English-speaking country does not necessarily indicate that a service user lacks proficiency in English.)

(b) Includes external territories, excludes Norfolk Island.

(c) Includes service users who only used recreation/holiday programs (service type 3.02) and who did not provide a response. This service type was not required to complete this data item.

Notes

1. Data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the staged roll-out of the NDIS. See Box 1.1 for more information.

2. Percentages are of the total excluding service users for whom country of birth was 'not stated/not collected'.

For additional data on service users by country of birth, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.22, S2.69, S3.1, S3.2, S4.1, S4.2.

Disability group

'Disability' group is a function-based categorisation intended to describe similar experiences of disability, not only in terms of underlying health conditions, but also in terms of the impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions, and support needs a person with disability may have (see AIHW 2016). It is not a diagnostic grouping, nor is there a one-to-one correspondence between a health condition and a disability group.

The individual disability groups collected in the DS NMDS can be further categorised into 4 broad groups—intellectual or learning; physical or diverse; sensory or speech; and psychiatric (see Table 3.6 for the composition of these broad groups).

In the DS NMDS, service users are asked to record their primary disability group—that is, the one that most clearly reflects their experience of disability, and which causes them the most difficulty in everyday life (not just within the context of the support offered). They are also asked about any other disability that causes them difficulty, referred to as 'other significant disability group'. On average, each service user reported about 2 disability groups (Supplementary table S2.33).

Around 1 in 3 (37%) of service users had an intellectual or learning disability as their primary disability (or 38% when 'other significant disability' is included) (tables 3.5 and 3.6).

The proportion of service users with an intellectual or learning disability has fallen over time, largely as a result of the movement of these service users to the NDIS (Table 3.6 and Figure 3.2; see also Chapter 5). In contrast, the proportion of service users with psychiatric disability has increased, as has the proportion of those with physical disability.

Table 3.5: Service users, by broad primary disability group, 2013–14 to 2017–18

Year	Intellectual/ learning Number	%	Physical/ diverse Number	%	Sensory/ speech Number	%	Psychiatric Number	%	Not stated/ not collected[a] Number	%	Total Number	%
2013–14	134,533	44.3	82,758	27.3	26,762	8.8	59,529	19.6	17,949	. .	321,531	100.0
2014–15	134,391	42.3	90,257	28.4	29,465	9.3	63,510	20.0	16,172	. .	333,795	100.0
2015–16	130,512	41.7	91,577	29.3	29,358	9.4	61,566	19.7	18,804	. .	331,817	100.0
2016–17	129,651	41.6	90,955	29.2	26,769	8.6	64,599	20.7	19,135	. .	331,109	100.0
2017–18	97,150	36.6	82,132	31.0	20,445	7.7	65,412	24.7	15,135	. .	280,274	100.0

(a) Includes service users who only used recreation/holiday programs (service type 3.02) and who did not provide a response. This service type was not required to complete this data item.

Notes

1. Data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the staged roll-out of the NDIS. See Box 1.1 for more information.
2. Percentages are of the total excluding service users for whom primary disability was 'not stated/not collected'.

Table 3.6: Service users, by primary or other significant disability group, 2017–18

Disability group	Primary disability group		Other significant disability group		Total disability group	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Intellectual/learning	*97,150*	*36.6*	*25,899*	*9.2*	*107,461*	*38.3*
Intellectual	57,559	21.7	10,634	3.8	68,193	24.3
Specific learning/ attention deficit disorder	7,726	2.9	8,764	3.1	16,490	5.9
Autism	27,399	10.3	7,450	2.7	34,849	12.4
Developmental delay	4,466	1.7	510	0.2	4,976	1.8
Physical/diverse	*82,132*	*31.0*	*57,952*	*20.7*	*126,312*	*45.1*
Physical	55,602	21.0	43,867	15.7	99,469	35.5
Acquired brain injury	9,388	3.5	3,405	1.2	12,793	4.6
Neurological	17,142	6.5	17,530	6.3	34,672	12.4
Sensory/speech	*20,445*	*7.7*	*22,706*	*8.1*	*42,100*	*15.0*
Deaf–blind	461	0.2	762	0.3	1,223	0.4
Vision	7,179	2.7	8,521	3.0	15,700	5.6
Hearing	11,076	4.2	6,517	2.3	17,593	6.3
Speech	1,729	0.7	10,444	3.7	12,173	4.3
Psychiatric	*65,412*	*24.7*	*35,454*	*12.6*	*100,866*	*36.0*
Total[a]	**265,139**	**100.0**	**280,274**	**100.0**	**280,274**	**100.0**

(a) Primary disability group was 'not stated/not collected' for 15,135 service users (which includes service users who only used recreation/holiday programs (service type 3.02) and who did not provide a response). The total for 'primary disability group' excludes these records, while the total for 'total disability group' includes these records.

Note: 'Other significant disability group' and 'total disability group' totals and broad groups are not the sum of components, because individuals may report no other significant disability or report multiple types of disability.

Figure 3.2: Primary disability group of service users, 2013–14 to 2017–18
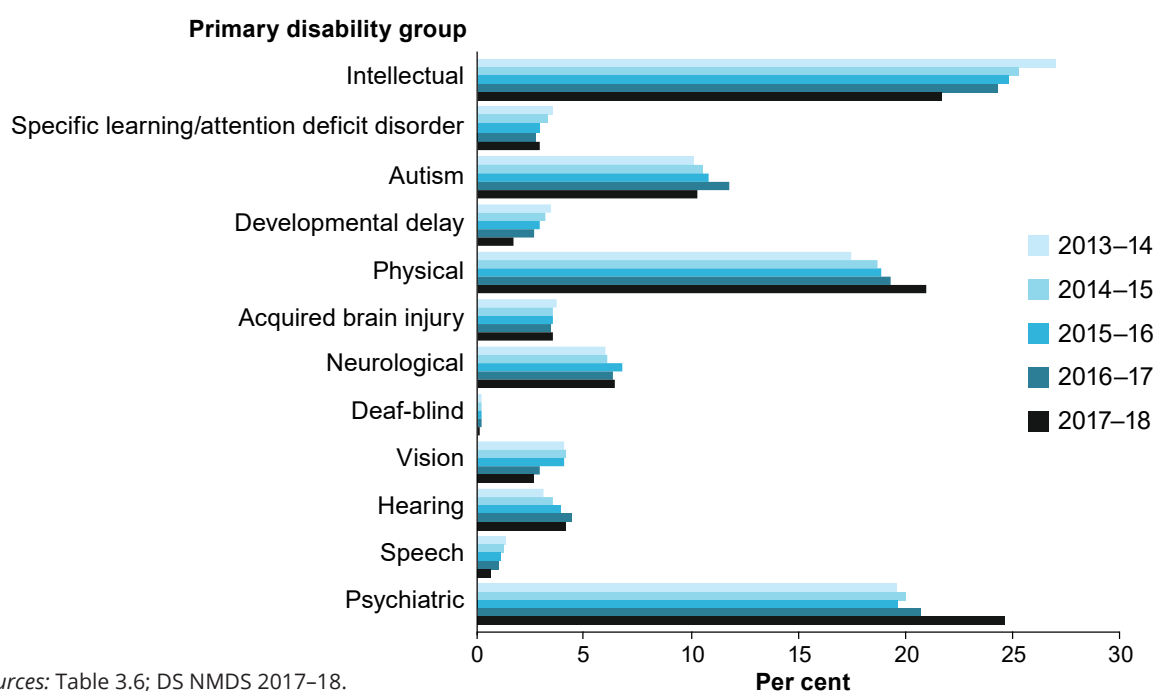
Sources: Table 3.6; DS NMDS 2017–18.

For additional data on service users by disability group, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.20, S2.28–S2.33, S2.37, S2.43, S2.49, S2.70, S2.73, S3.1, S3.2, S4.1, S4.2.

Functional need

People with disability might require assistance to perform activities in different areas of their lives. The DS NMDS collects information on the functional needs of service users against 9 selected life areas. A person's level of need is evaluated in comparison with a person of the same age without disability.

These 9 life-area activities can be grouped into 3 broader life areas—'activities of daily living' (ADL); 'activities of independent living' (AIL); and 'activities of work, education, and community living' (AWEC). The majority of service users needed at least some assistance in 1 or more broad life area, with:

• 61% 'always or sometimes' needing assistance with activities of daily living

• 74% 'always or sometimes' needing assistance with acitivies of independent living

• 81% 'always or sometimes' needing assistance with activities of work, education, and community living (Figure 3.3; see also supplementary tables S2.44 and S2.45 for composition of these life areas).

These data are affected by users of open employment services (see Chapter 2), who generally have a lower level of functional need. When service users who used only open employment services are excluded from the data:

• 84% of service users 'always or sometimes' needed assistance with activities of daily living

• 95% 'always or sometimes' needed assistance with activities of independent living

• 94% 'always or sometimes' needed assistance with activities of work, education, and community living (Supplementary table S3.5).

Figure 3.3: Service users who always or sometimes need assistance, service group by broad life area, 2017–18
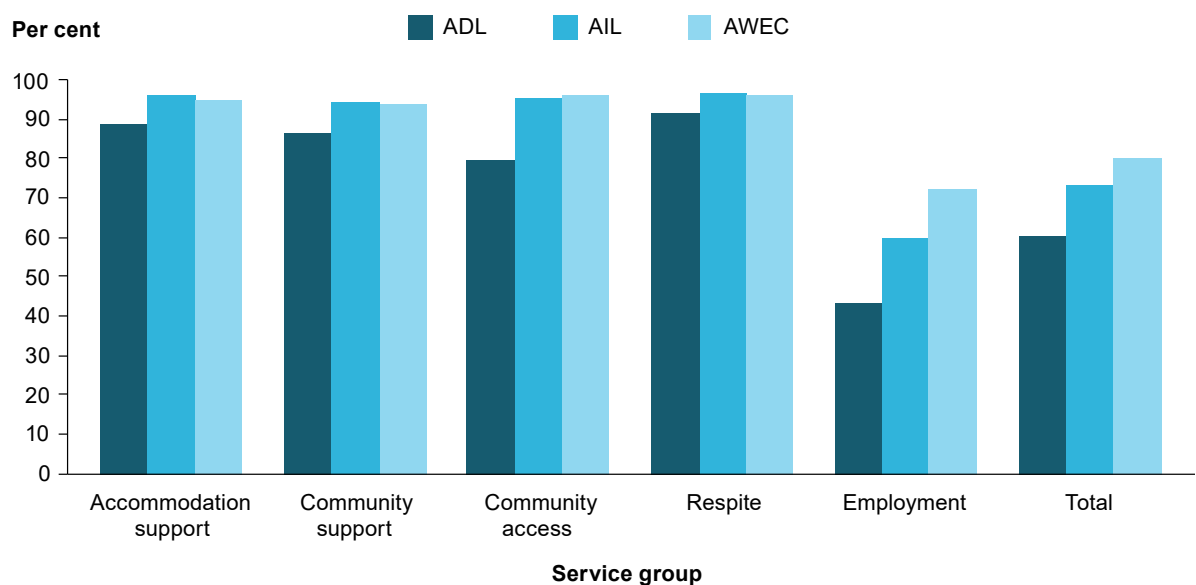
Source: Supplementary table S2.46.

For additional data on service users and their need for assistance in a life area, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.44–S2.49, S2.61, S3.1, S3.2, S3.5, S4.1, S4.2, S4.5.

Living arrangement

Forty-four percent of service users lived with family, 30% lived alone, and 27% lived with others (such as sharing with a friend or a non-related carer) (Table 3.7).

Table 3.7: Service users, by living arrangement, 2013–14 to 2017–18

Year	Lives alone		Lives with family		Lives with others		Not stated/ not collected[a]		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2013–14	63,566	21.9	156,537	54.0	69,601	24.0	31,827	. .	321,531	100.0
2014–15	70,905	23.7	155,669	52.1	72,283	24.2	34,938	. .	333,795	100.0
2015–16	65,791	23.1	150,295	52.8	68,394	24.0	47,337	. .	331,817	100.0
2016–17	73,379	25.0	148,030	50.4	72,371	24.6	37,329	. .	331,109	100.0
2017–18	74,126	29.8	108,766	43.7	66,033	26.5	31,349	. .	280,274	100.0

(a) Includes service users who only used recreation/holiday programs (service type 3.02) and who did not provide a response. This service type was not required to complete this data item.

Notes

1. Data from 2013–14 onwards are affected by the staged roll-out of the NDIS. See Box 1.1 for more information.
2. Percentages are of the total excluding service users for whom living arrangement was 'not stated/not collected'.

The majority (81%) of service users lived in a private residence. Other types of residential settings included boarding houses or private hotels (6%); domestic-scale supported-living facilities (such as group homes) (5%); and supported accommodation facilities (2%) (Supplementary table S2.16).

Most of the service users who lived in a domestic-scale supported-living facility or in a supported accommodation facility had an intellectual primary disability (71% and 62%, respectively) (Supplementary table S2.31). This compares with 18% of those living in a private residence.

For additional data on service users by living arrangement and/or residential setting, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.20, S2.23, S2.31, S2.47, S3.1, S3.2, S4.1, S4.2.

Employment and income

In the DS NMDS, service users are considered to be in the labour force if they are aged 15 and over, and are either employed or looking for work. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of service users aged 15 and over were not in the labour force (Supplementary table S2.16). This was influenced by the large number of open employment service users, who, by definition, are likely to be in the labour force (tables 2.2 and 5.2; Supplementary table S3.1). For those in the labour force, close to three-quarters (71%) were unemployed, and 29% were employed (Supplementary table S2.16).

One-quarter (25%) of Indigenous service users aged 15 and over were not in the labour force, which was similar to their non-Indigenous counterparts (24%) (Supplementary table S2.20). But Indigenous service users in the labour force were less likely to be employed than their non-Indigenous counterparts (18% compared with 30%).

In the DS NMDS, service users aged 16 and over are asked about their main source of income. The most common source of income for service users aged 16 and over was the Disability Support Pension (45%), followed by 'other pension or benefit' (42%) (Supplementary table S2.16).

More than half (53%) of *employed* service users aged 16–64 reported the Disability Support Pension as their main source of income, compared with 28% of those who were unemployed (Supplementary table S2.29). In contrast, unemployed service users were more likely to report another pension or benefit as their main source of income (69%) compared with those who were employed (10%).

For additional data on service users by labour force status and main source of income, see supplementary tables S2.16, S2.17, S2.20, S2.27, S2.29, S2.30, S2.68, S2.72, S2.73, S3.1, S3.2, S4.1, S4.2.

4   Informal carers

Informal carers play an important role in the lives of many people with disability. An informal carer is a person—such as a family member, friend or neighbour—who provides regular and sustained care and assistance to the person requiring support. This includes people who might receive a pension or benefit associated with their caring role, but does not include people, either paid or voluntary, whose services are arranged by a formal service organisation. Informal carers provide essential support either in place of, or in addition to, NDA services. They might also be the recipient of services under the NDA, such as respite services.

In the DS NMDS, information is collected on whether a service user has an informal carer, as well as some characteristics of that carer. About two-thirds (65%) of service users had an informal carer (Figure 4.1). Of those:

- most (83%) reported that their informal carer was also their primary carer—that is, an informal carer who helps with 1 or more activities of daily living (self-care, mobility, or communication) (Supplementary table S2.50)

- most (84%) had a female carer, most often their mother (69% of all carers, or 83% of female carers) (Supplementary table S2.50)

- about 1 in 9 (11%) were cared for by their spouse or partner; as the age of the service user increased, the likelihood of a spouse or partner being the carer also rose, with being cared for by a 'spouse or partner' the most common informal care arrangement for service users aged 65 and over (58%) (Supplementary table S2.56)

- about 1 in 7 (14%) had a carer aged 65 and over—with almost three-quarters of these being their parent (72%), most often their mother (59%) (supplementary tables S2.50 and S2.57).

Accommodation support service users were the least likely to have an informal carer (45%), particularly those living in institutional accommodation (20%) and group homes (36%) (Figure 4.1; Supplementary table S2.53).

Figure 4.1: Service users, service group by existence of an informal carer, 2017–18
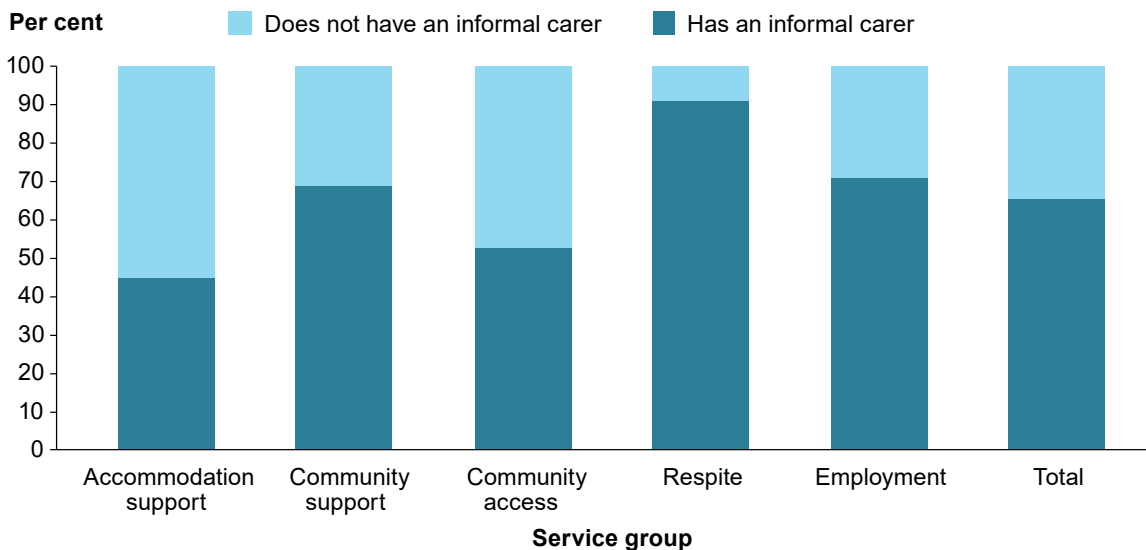
Source: Supplementary table S2.53.

For additional data on service users with an informal carer, see supplementary tables S2.50– S2.62, S3.4, S4.4.

5   Service users who transitioned to the NDIS

About 40,000 NDA service users transitioned to the NDIS during 2017–18 (Table 5.1; see also Chapter 1 and Box 5.1). This equates to about 14% of all service users, or 27% when those who only used open employment services are excluded.

According to quarterly reports published by the NDIA, by 30 June 2018 around 184,000 eligible people with disability had joined the NDIS (NDIA 2018). This compares with around 82,400 NDA services users formally recorded in the DS NMDS as having transitioned from NDA services to the NDIS. There are various reasons for this difference (see Box 5.1).

Box 5.1: About data on service users transitioning to the NDIS

There are several reasons why NDIA-published data on people with an approved and active NDIS plan might not match DS NMDS data on NDA service users who transitioned to the NDIS. In particular, the NDIA data include people who have not been reported as part of the DS NMDS, such as those who were referred directly to the NDIS. This is especially the case for very young children and those who meet the early intervention eligibility requirements under the NDIS. It is also possible for an NDA service user to have exited NDA services before their NDIS plan approval date. In such cases, they would not appear in the DS NMDS data as having transitioned to the NDIS.

Some of the differences in characteritics between service users who transitioned to the NDIS and other NDA service users are the result of the staged transition to the NDIS. For example, the relatively younger age profile of transitioned service users in Tasmania and South Australia in the early years of the roll-out was a result of the initial focus on moving children and young people into the NDIS in these jurisdictions.

More information on the transition arrangements can be found in the bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and each state and territory.

Not all NDA service users will move to the NDIS. Service users who transitioned in 2017–18, as well as those who used services that are likely to become part of the NDIS in the future (that is, service users excluding those who only used open employment services), generally had a higher level of functional need than other service users, and were more likely to need at least some assistance in 1 or more of the broad life areas (Table 5.2). They were also more likely to have an intellectual or learning disability, live with their family, receive the Disability Support Pension, and not be in the labour force. When in the labour force, they were more likely to be employed and less likely to be unemployed, compared with other service users.

For additional data on service users who transitioned to the NDIS, see supplementary tables S4.1–S4.5. For additional data on service users excluding those who only used open employment services, see tables 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and supplementary tables S3.1–S3.5.

Table 5.1: Service users who transitioned to the NDIS, by state and territory, 2013–14 to 2017–18 (number)

Year	NSW[a]	Vic[b]	Qld[b]	WA[c]	SA	Tas	ACT[d]	NT[e]	Total
2013–14	1,329	1,901	2	3	403	576	—	—	4,200
2014–15	1,049	231	—	103	237	60	189	—	1,866
2015–16	1,593	84	235	390	1,099	45	88	—	3,520
2016–17	18,351	5,493	3,282	4,051	1,064	405	100	94	32,755
2017–18	18,248	12,253	2,844	1,872	3,943	891	19	121	40,018

(a) New South Wales completed transition to the NDIS during 2017–18 and, because of complexities associated with the transition, only 2 quarters of DS NMDS data were collected in 2017–18. Therefore, data for 2017–18 may be an underestimate. However, it is likely that very few clients received services only in the second half of the year, so the first 2 quarters are considered largely representative of the full year.

(b) Data for Victoria and Queensland include specialist psychiatric disability services. Other jurisdictional data do not.

(c) Both the NDIA and the Western Australian Government operated NDIS trials in Western Australia from 1 July 2014 until 30 June 2017. Data for those years include the Western Australian Government-operated NDIS trial sites. On 1 July 2017, the dual NDIS trial ceased and the Western Australian Government began administering the NDIS in Western Australia. For this reason, as at 30 June 2017, service users of the Western Australian Government-operated trial sites were considered to have transitioned to the NDIS. These service users are flagged in the resubmitted 2016–17 DS NMDS data as having transitioned to the NDIS and are excluded from the 2017–18 data.

(d) Some service type outlets in the Australian Capital Territory may have been less responsive in 2014–15 because of the complexities associated with the changeover to the NDIS. The Australian Capital Territory Government did not collect DS NMDS data in 2015–16 and 2016–17, and was not required to collect DS NMDS data from 2017–18 onwards (as transition to the NDIS in that jurisdiction was completed by the end of 2016–17).

(e) Data for the Northern Territory include Basic Community Care services. Other jurisdictional data do not. While the NDIS commenced in the Northern Territory on 1 July 2014 for people up to age 65 living in the Barkly region, no NDA service users were reported by the Northern Territory Government as having transitioned to the NDIS in 2014–15 or 2015–16.

Notes

1. Table represents people who were reported in the DS NMDS during the collection period who then transitioned to the NDIS, and may not represent all service users who have transitioned to the NDIS.

2. Row totals might not be the sum of components, because individuals might have used services in more than 1 state or territory during the 12-month period.

3. Service users might appear as having transitioned to the NDIS in jurisdictions in which the NDIS has not commenced. This is because a service user identified as transitioning to the NDIS has moved between jurisdictions during the 12-month period.

4. Service users of Australian Government services and state/territory services are merged in this table.

Table 5.2: Service users who transitioned to the NDIS, selected characteristics and comparisons, 2017–18

Selected characteristics	Service users who transitioned to the NDIS[a]	Service users excluding those who only used open employment	All service users
Service group—accommodation support (%)	17.9	18.8	10.1
Service group—community support (%)	68.6	70.0	37.5
Service group—community access (%)	21.6	23.7	12.7
Service group—respite (%)	20.1	17.6	9.4
Service group—supported employment (%)	17.1	9.9	5.3
Age—mean age (years)	30.5	33.2	36.9
Sex—male (%)	61.6	59.5	58.0
Country of birth—Australian-born (%)	93.6	89.6	84.5
Indigenous status—Indigenous (%)	6.4	6.0	5.9
Primary disability group—intellectual/ learning disability (%)	66.7	54.9	36.6
Other significant disability group—intellectual/ learning disability (%)	15.7	11.2	9.2
Total disability group—intellectual/learning disability (%)	67.1	53.0	38.3
Always or sometimes need assistance with activities of daily living (%)	88.3	83.5	61.1
Always or sometimes need assistance with activities of independent living (%)	96.6	94.5	74.0
Always or sometimes need assistance with activities of work, education and community living (%)	96.9	94.5	80.8
Living arrangement—lives with family (%)	69.9	68.0	43.7
Living arrangement—lives alone (%)	10.3	11.4	29.8
Residential setting—private residence (%)	78.2	75.7	81.5
Residential setting—domestic-scale supported-living facility (%)	9.1	8.4	4.7
Residential setting—supported accommodation facility (%)	4.0	4.2	2.1
Residential setting—boarding house/private hotel (%)	0.8	0.8	6.1
Not in the labour force (aged 15 and over) (%)	51.7	55.9	24.3
In the labour force (aged 15 and over)—employed (%)	70.6	60.6	29.2
In the labour force (aged 15 and over)—unemployed (%)	29.4	39.4	70.8
Main source of income—Disability Support Pension (aged 16 and over) (%)	85.6	79.0	45.4
Main source of income—other pension or benefit (aged 16 and over) (%)	5.0	9.5	41.9
Has an informal carer (%)	68.0	61.8	65.4

(a)   Represents people who were reported in the DS NMDS during the collection period who then transitioned to the NDIS, and might not represent all service users who have transitioned to the NDIS.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ADL	activities of daily living
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AIL	activities of independent living
AWEC	activities of work, education, and community living
DS NMDS	Disability Services National Minimum Data Set
EPG	English proficiency group
NDA	National Disability Agreement
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Symbols

—	nil or rounded to zero
. .	not applicable

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Related publications

This bulletin is part of an annual series that also includes supplementary data tables and data cubes. These, and other reports related to disability and disability services, can be downloaded from the AIHW website.

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**Stronger evidence,
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