



# **Australians living with communication disability**

**2015**

**4430.0**

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

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### INTRODUCTION

1 Communication is fundamental to development and wellbeing. The ability to share information and be understood is critical to forming relationships, education and employment, as well as participating in society more generally.

People with communication disability, whose ability to understand or be understood is limited, may face barriers to this participation.<sup>1</sup>

2 Information on the number of people with communication disability, the types of long-term health conditions and restrictions they have, and how these affect their ability to function in everyday life can assist in planning and delivering adequate support and services.

3 Additionally, a person may have a limitation such as a stutter, developmental language disorder or hearing loss which can be assisted with early intervention or a communication aid. There are also those with complex communication needs, who may have a combination of physical, cognitive or sensory impairments as part of a developmental disability, for instance cerebral palsy, or an acquired disability, such as those resulting from brain injury or stroke.<sup>2</sup>

4 The ABS's 2015 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), estimated that 1.2 million Australians had some level of communication disability, ranging from those who function without difficulty in communicating every day but who use a communication aid, to those who cannot understand or be understood at all.

5 While the proportion of Australians with communication disability has remained relatively stable over the last decade (4.5% in 2003 and 5.0% in 2015), Australia's growing population means the actual number of people with this type of limitation has increased, from 883,600 in 2003 to 1,175,200 in 2015. This was driven largely by an increase in the number of people aged 65 years and over with communication disability (from 511,500 people in 2003 to 753,400 people in 2015), reflecting Australia's ageing population.

6 Using data from the SDAC, this article presents an overview of communication disability in Australia, and the impact it has on the everyday lives of those who are affected by it.

### ABOUT THE SDAC AND THIS ARTICLE

7 The SDAC is designed to measure the prevalence of disability in Australia and the need for support for people with disability. It collects detailed information from three target populations living in households as well as those in cared-accommodation: people with disability; older people (those aged 65 years and over); and people who care for those with disability, who have a long-term health condition, or who are aged 65 years and over.

8 The activity of communication in the SDAC is defined as understanding and being understood by family and friends or strangers.

9 The SDAC provides information on four levels of communication disability:

- Profound limitation (people who cannot understand or be understood at all and always need help when communicating);
- Severe limitation (includes people who sometimes need help understanding or being understood and people who communicate more easily with sign language or other non-spoken communication)
- Moderate limitation (people who don't need help but have difficulty understanding or being understood by someone they don't know)
- Mild limitation (people with no difficulty understanding or being understood, but use a communication aid).

10 More detailed descriptions about these levels and other information about the SDAC can be found in the [Explanatory Notes](#).

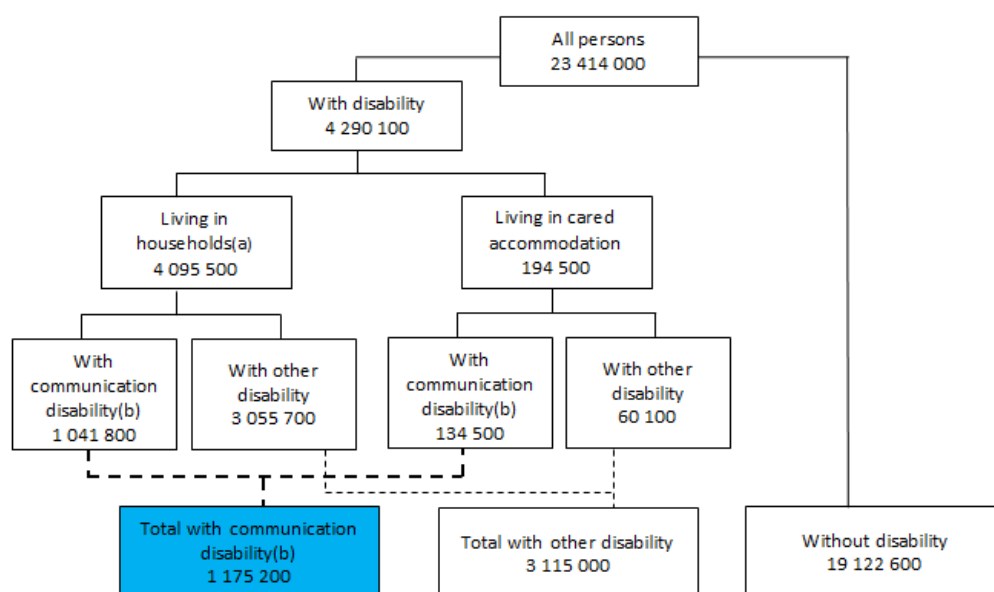
In this article, the following terms are used to define the different population groups mentioned:

- People with communication disability (that is, people who, according to the SDAC, have a communication limitation and may or may not have another disability)
- People with other disability (that is, all other people with disability who did not have a communication limitation)
- People without disability.

In the SDAC, less information is collected on people in cared accommodation than for people living in households as some topics are not suitable for collection through a proxy or are not relevant to those residing in cared accommodation. Throughout this article, the majority of data refer to people living in cared accommodation and households, however, it has been noted where data only include people living in households.

# AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

## OVERVIEW OF COMMUNICATION DISABILITY IN SDAC



### Note:

- estimates have been rounded to the nearest one hundred persons
- due to rounding, the sum of sub-totals may not equal totals

a) 'Living in households' comprises all private dwellings and self-care retirement accommodation but excludes cared-accommodation.

b) Includes people who may or may not also have another disability

Source(s): ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers—2015

## COMMUNICATION DISABILITY ACROSS AUSTRALIA

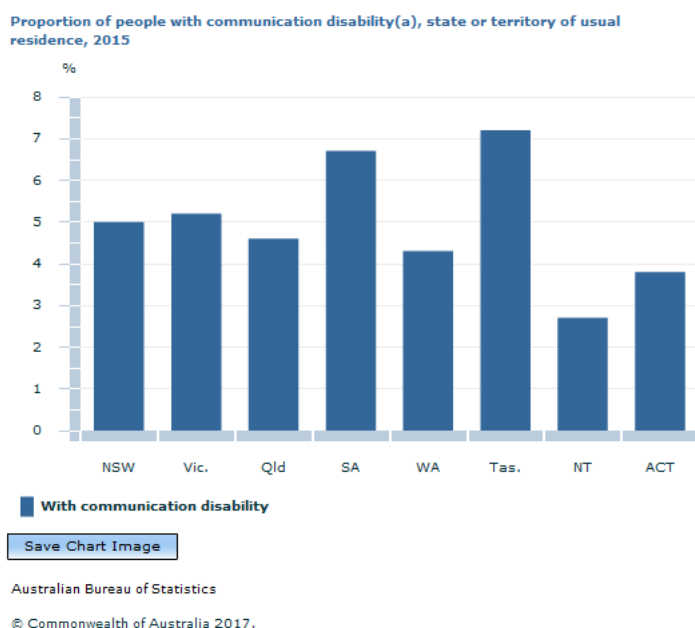
11 Communication disability can affect a person's ability to speak, hear, listen, understand, read, write and use their voice and social skills.<sup>3</sup> With the level of limitation ranging from mild to profound and difficulties which can be temporary or last a lifetime, understanding the diversity of people with communication disability and their various needs can be complex.

12 The following analysis looks at communication disability among Australia's population and provides an insight into the prevalence and characteristics of communication disability in society.

## GEOGRAPHY

13 Communication disability affects people across Australia. Not surprisingly, the three most populous states had the largest number of people with communication disability in 2015, with most people in Australia with communication disability living in New South Wales (32.3% or 379,200 people), Victoria (26.1% or 307,000 people) and Queensland (18.2% or 214,000 people).

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015



**Footnote(s):** (a) As a proportion of all people in that state or territory.

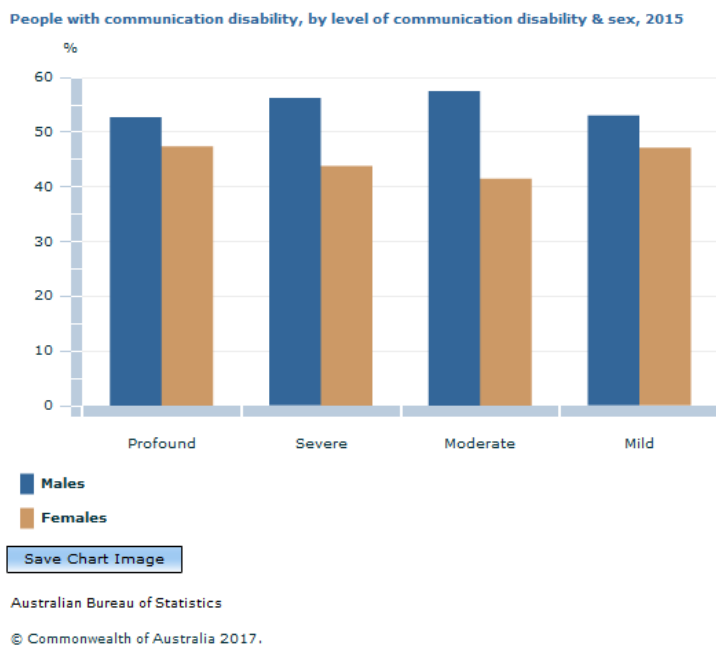
**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

14 However, when these numbers are considered as a proportion of a State or Territory's total population, Tasmania and South Australia had the highest proportion of people with communication disability (7.2% and 6.7%, respectively). This mirrors the States with the largest proportion of older people, where in 2015, 17.8% of people in Tasmania and 16.7% of people in South Australia were aged 65 years and over.<sup>4</sup>

### SEX

15 In 2015, there were more males than females with communication disability. This was evident across all levels of disability, particularly among those with a moderate communication disability (57.5% males and 41.5% females). Differences between the number of males and females with communication disability were statistically significant across all levels except at the profound level.

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015



**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

### LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION DISABILITY

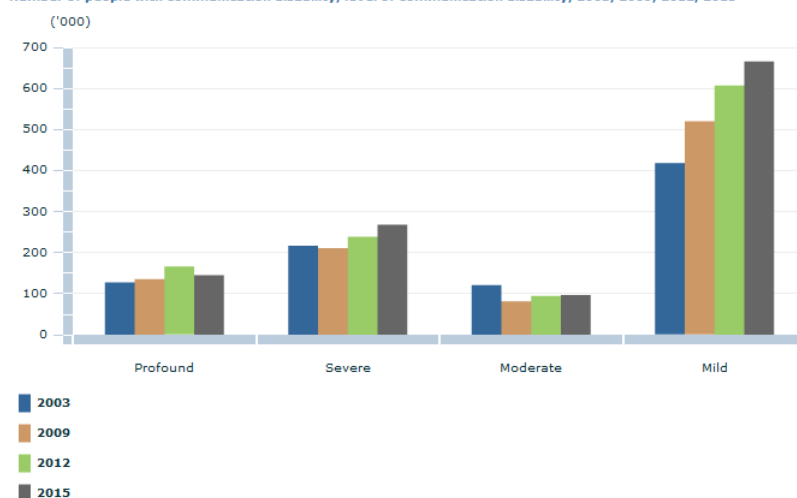
16 According to the 2015 SDAC, of the 4.3 million Australians living with disability over one-quarter (27.4% or 1.2 million people) had communication disability. While for many of these people, the level of communication disability was moderate or mild (64.8% of all people with communication disability), over one-third (35.2%) had profound or severe communication disability.

17 Between 2003 and 2015, the total number of people with mild communication disability significantly increased (from 417,700 people to 665,700 people, respectively), driven largely by the increase in the number of people with mild communication disability aged 65 years and over (from 310,200 people in 2003 to 541,200 people in 2015). This increase is indicative of Australia's changing demographics of an ageing population.

18 Among the other levels of communication disability there was a significant decrease in the overall number of people with moderate communication disability between 2003 and 2015 (from 121,000 people to 96,700 people, respectively). While the number of Australians with profound or severe communication disability also increased across this time period, these differences were not statistically significant.

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

Number of people with communication disability, level of communication disability, 2003, 2009, 2012, 2015



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**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

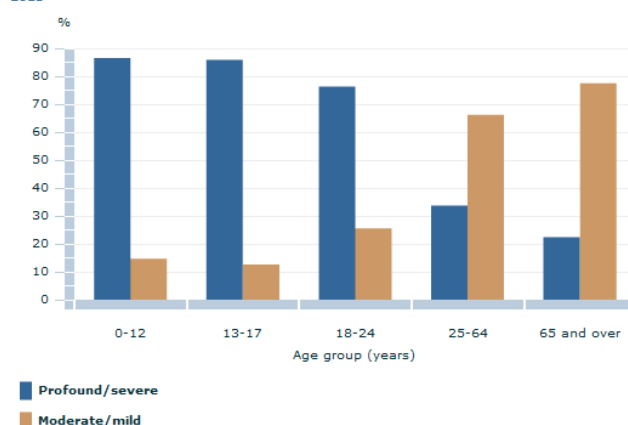
### LEVEL OF COMMUNICATION DISABILITY BY AGE

19 The severity of communication disability varies with age, with the highest levels of severity (profound and severe disability) more likely to be found among children (86.5%), adolescents (85.9%) and young adults (76.3%).

20 From around the age of 25 years this prevalence drops off with 33.7% of adults (aged 25-64 years) and 22.4% of older people (aged 65 years and over) with communication disability having profound or severe communication disability.

21 There is a corresponding increase in the prevalence of moderate or mild communication disability, which increases around the age of 25 years. Two-thirds (66.2%) of people aged 25-64 years with communication disability had moderate or mild communication disability, while just over three-quarters (77.5%) of those aged 65 years and over had moderate or mild communication disability.

Prevalence of communication disability, by level of communication disability & age(a), 2015



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**Footnote(s):** (a) As a proportion of all people with communication disability in that age group.

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

### COEXISTING LIMITATIONS AND/OR RESTRICTIONS

22 For people with disability, the SDAC collected information about whether they had a specific limitation in the core activities of self-care, mobility or communication, or were restricted in schooling or employment (for more information see [Appendix 1 – Limitations and Restrictions](#)).

23 Among people with communication disability, just over two-thirds (67.1%) had mobility limitation and more than two in five (43.5%) had self-care limitation. In addition, just over one-third (40.7%) reported schooling or employment restrictions.

### ALL PEOPLE WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, BY SPECIFIC LIMITATION OR RESTRICTION—2015

	With communication disability	
	'000	%
<b>Mobility limitation</b>		
Has mobility limitation	788.3	67.1
No mobility limitation	386.1	32.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,175.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Self-care limitation</b>		
Has self-care limitation	510.7	43.5
No self-care limitation	664.7	56.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,175.2</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Schooling or employment restriction(a)(b)(c)</b>		
Restricted in schooling or employment	410.1	40.7
Not restricted in schooling or employment	595.9	59.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,006.9</b>	<b>100.0</b>

a) Includes people aged 15 years (living in households) and over with disability.

b) Includes people aged 5-14 years (living in households) who currently attend school.

c) Includes people aged 5-14 years (living in households) who do not currently attend school because of their disability.

Source(s): ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers—2015

### UNMET NEED FOR FORMAL ASSISTANCE

24 People with communication difficulties may require formal assistance from an organised service provider to reduce or minimise the impact of communication difficulties on everyday life.

Unmet need for formal assistance refers to people with communication disability who reported a need for formal assistance and:

- received some formal assistance for that need but not enough, or
- received no formal assistance for that need.

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

25 In the 2015 SDAC, 144,400 people with communication disability reported a need for formal assistance for communication from an organised service provider. Just under half (49.7% or 71,800 people) had an unmet need for formal assistance with communication.

26 Proportionally, of all people with communication disability in 2015 who reported an unmet need for formal communication assistance, three out of five (60.7%) were children (aged 0-12 years). This is consistent with 2009 and 2012 findings, where the majority of those with a communication disability who reported an unmet need for formal assistance were also children aged 0-12 years (68.6% in 2009 and 60.1% in 2012).

### COMMUNICATION AIDS AND EQUIPMENT

27 Communication aids and equipment empower people with hearing, voice, speech and language disorder to actively engage in the world around them.<sup>5</sup>

28 According to the 2015 SDAC, the majority (81.6% or 850,500) of Australians with communication disability (living in households) use aids or equipment to assist them with their disability. Almost two-thirds (63.6%) of people with communication disability had a hearing aid, while others used low technology reading or writing aids (4.4%), high technology reading or writing aids (4.3%) and low technology speaking aids (1.8%). Other forms of aids used include email or internet (6.2%), cochlear implants (1.1%) and high technology speaking aids (1.0%).

### LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

29 In 2015, of people aged 15-64 years with communication disability (living in households), around two in five (37.5% or 98,600 people) were participating in the labour force, that is people who were employed or unemployed (for information about labour force participation see Labour Force, Australia. This proportion has remained consistent since 2003.

30 In contrast, more than half (55.6%) of people with other disability, and most (83.2%) of those without disability were participating in the labour force in 2015.

#### ALL PEOPLE AGED 15-64 YEARS(a), DISABILITY STATUS BY LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE—2003, 2009, 2012, 2015

	With disability			Without disability
	Communication disability(b)	Other disability	Total with disability	
	%	%	%	%
2003	39.7	54.7	53.3	80.6
2009	40.6	55.8	54.3	82.8
2012	43.9	54.2	52.8	82.5
2015	37.5	55.6	53.4	83.2

a) Living in households

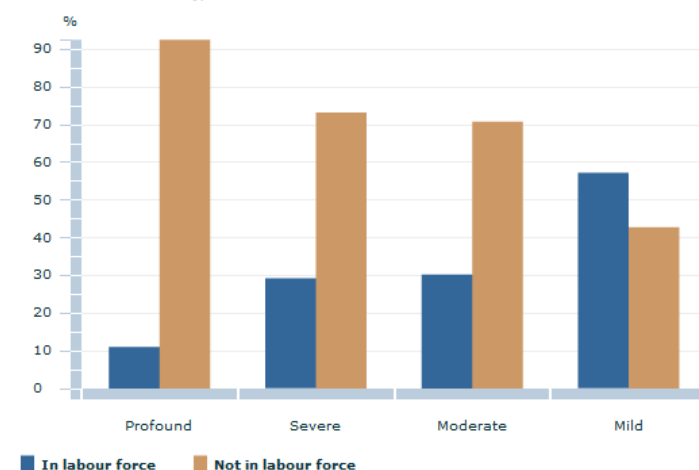
b) Includes people who may or may not also have another disability

Source(s): ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers—2015

31 The level of communication disability has an impact on the labour force status of people with communication disability. In 2015, people aged 15-64 years (living in households) with mild communication disability (57.2%) were more likely to be in the labour force than those with profound (11.0%), severe (29.2%) or moderate (30.2%) communication disability.

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

People with communication disability(a)(b), labour force status by level of communication disability, 2015



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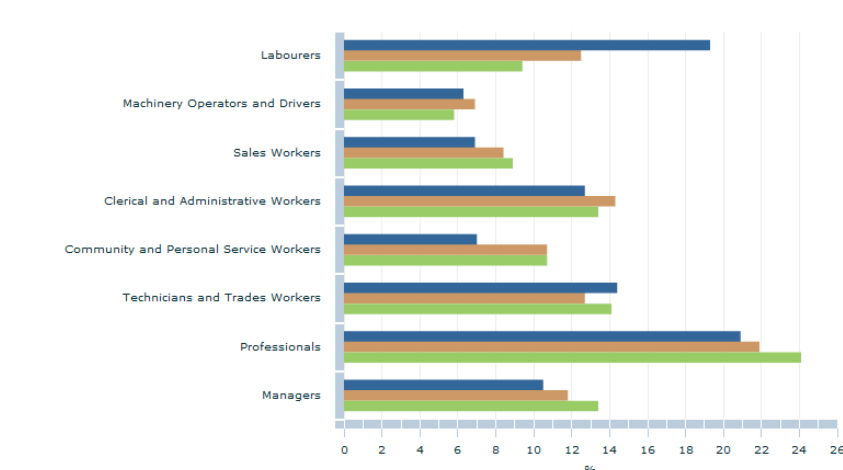
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**Footnote(s):** (a) Aged 15 to 64 years. (b) Living in households.

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

32 In 2015, people with communication disability who were employed worked in a variety of occupations, such as ‘professionals’ (20.9%), ‘technicians and trades workers’ (14.4%) and ‘clerical and administrative workers’ (12.7%). Just under one in five (19.3%) people with communication disability were employed as ‘labourers’, in comparison to one in eight (12.5%) people with other disability and nearly one in ten (9.4%) people without disability.

Employed people aged 15–64 years(a), occupation of main job by disability status(b), 2015



With communication disability  
With other disability  
Without disability

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**Footnote(s):** (a) Living in households. (b) The denominators for these proportions are the total number of employed people in each category, for example total number of employed people with communication disability.

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

33 Almost three-quarters (73.0%) of people with communication disability reported they had employment restrictions, including the type of job (30.0%), difficulty changing jobs or getting a preferred job (26.3%) or being restricted in the number of hours (15.8%). A considerable proportion (40.3%) reported they were permanently unable to work because of their condition(s). For more information on employment restriction, see [Glossary](#)

### HOUSEHOLD INCOME

34 There is some evidence of a link between social disadvantage and people with a communication disability. For instance, children from low income families are more at risk of clinically significant language problems, or language disorders.<sup>6</sup>

35 People aged 15-64 years (living in households) with communication disability who reported their income in the 2015 SDAC, were more likely (48.9%) to live in a household in the lowest two equivalised gross household income quintiles (earning less than \$1,086 per week) than people without disability (24.4%). For more information about equivalised gross household income quintiles, see here.

### PEOPLE AGED 15-64 YEARS(a), DISABILITY STATUS, BY EQUIVALISED GROSS HOUSEHOLD INCOME QUINTILES(b)—2015

	With disability			Without disability
	Communication disability(c)	Other disability	Total with disability	
	%	%	%	%
Lowest quintile	21.5	25.9	25.4	11.0
Second quintile	27.8	23.6	24.1	13.4
<i>Lowest two quintiles</i>	<i>48.9</i>	<i>49.5</i>	<i>49.5</i>	<i>24.4</i>
Third quintile	23.9	20.2	20.6	23.0
Fourth quintile	15.9	16.6	16.7	26.1
Highest quintile	11.0	13.5	13.4	26.5
<b>All persons</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

a) Living in households

b) Excludes people who did not know their equivalised household income

c) Includes people who may or may not also have another disability

Source(s): ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers—2015

### SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

36 When the ability to communicate is impaired or absent, it can cause social isolation, loss of autonomy, restricted activities and stigmatisation.<sup>1</sup>

37 In 2015, almost three-quarters (74.7% or 756,200) of people with communication disability (living in households) participated in activities away from home in the previous 12 months. This proportion was similar to people with other disability (78.4%). Just under half (46.4%) attended a movie, concert, theatre or other performing arts event, while others participated in exercise or recreation (43.4%), visited a public library (30.9%) or botanic garden, zoo or aquarium (22.2%).

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

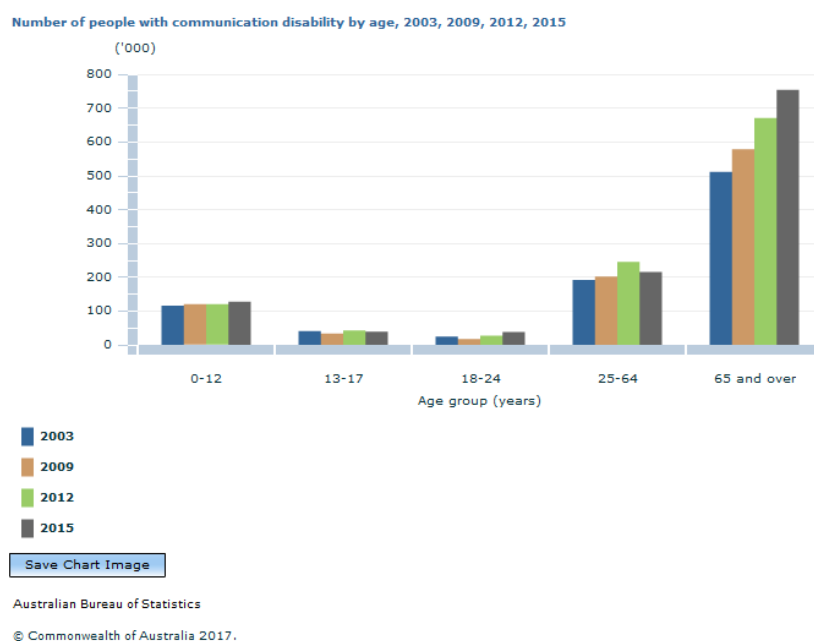
38 Many people participated in activities inside the home within the previous three months, including visits from family or friends (88.3%), phone calls with family or friends (82.5%) and art or craftwork or practical hobby group (10.5%).

### COMMUNICATION DISABILITY ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

39 Examining the impact of communication disability across the lifespan, from the very first detection of communication disorders in infants, to the onset of hearing impairments in older age, can provide insight into the effect of such disability at different life stages.

40 The 2015 SDAC reported there were 4.3 million Australians with disability. Just over one-quarter (27.4% or 1.2 million people) of these people had some level of communication disability.

41 As disability in general is correlated with age, older people (65 years and over) were more likely to have communication disability than all other age groups. While the proportion of older Australians with communication disability has remained relatively stable over time, consistent with Australia's ageing demographic, this older age group with communication disability has also seen the largest increase over time. The number of older people with communication disability increased from 511,500 people in 2003 to 753,400 people in 2015.

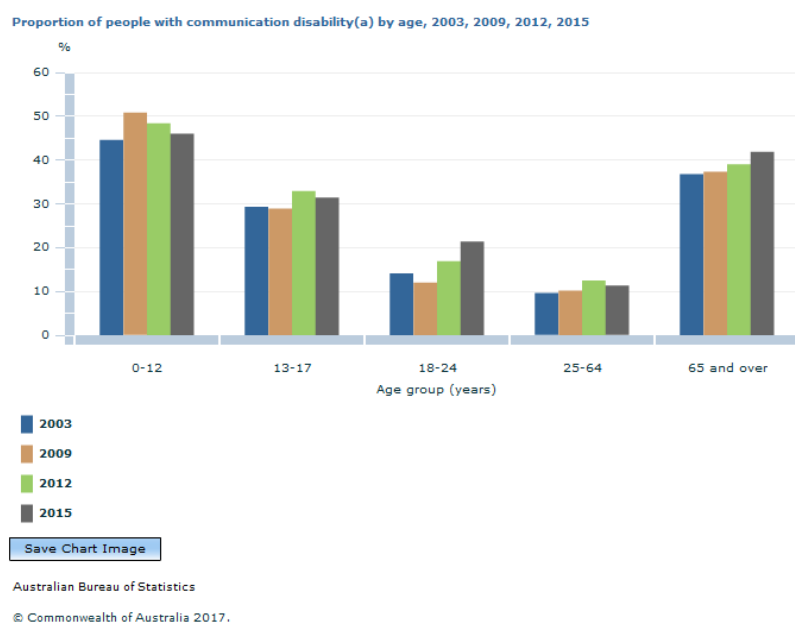


**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

42 Of all people with disability, the greatest proportion of people with communication disability were among children aged less than 13 years (46.0% or 127,900 people) and people aged 65 years and over (41.9% or 753,400 people). This pattern has remained consistent between 2003 and 2015 and aligns with the overall pattern of disability prevalence which is at its highest among older Australians, and among children due to autism and related disorders.<sup>7,8</sup>

43 The largest proportional increase of people with communication disability within each age group over time was among young adults (aged 18-24 years), with an increase from 14.1% of all people in this age group with communication disability in 2003 to 21.4% in 2015.

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015



**Footnote(s):** (a) As a proportion of people with disability in that age group.

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings–2015

44 Where data are available of suitable quality, information from the 2015 SDAC allows us to take a lifespan approach to understand the impact of communication disability at different stages of life.

### CHILDREN (AGED 0-12 YEARS)

#### *Level of communication disability*

45 According to the 2015 SDAC, there were 278,100 children with disability, of which almost half (46.0% or 127,900 people) had some level of communication disability. The majority (86.5%) of these children had profound or severe communication disability.

#### *Main long-term health conditions*

46 There are a number of types of communication disability children may have. These can range from a language impairment or stammer through to conditions such as learning disability or autism.<sup>1</sup>

47 Of children with communication disability in 2015, over a third (36.7%) had ‘autism and related disorders’ reported as their main long-term health condition. Other commonly reported conditions included ‘unspecified speech difficulties’ (9.9%), ‘other developmental/learning disorders’ (9.9%) and ‘speech impediments’ (7.4%). These long-term health conditions may have contributed to, or coexisted with, their communication disability

#### *Assistance needed and received*

48 While communication disability may have a range of causes, early identification and intervention plays a significant role in helping to reduce or minimise the impact of communication difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

49 In 2015, around four out of five (80.5% or 103,000 people) children with communication disability (living in households) reported a need for formal and/or informal assistance with communication. Of these children, most (82.6% or 85,100 people) reported a need for formal assistance, that is, paid assistance from government or non-government organisations or persons, on a regular basis. Of the 85,100 children needing formal assistance, 11.4% were

not receiving any formal assistance but needed it, 38.7% were receiving it and needed more and 46.2% were receiving it and didn't need more. A more detailed description of formal assistance is provided in the [Glossary](#).

50 As with formal assistance, the majority (93.8% or 96,600 people) of children with communication disability (living in households) also reported a need for informal assistance, that is, unpaid help or supervision from family or friends. One in six (16.1%) of these children were receiving informal assistance and needed more while just over three-quarters (77.8%) were receiving it and did not need more. A more detailed description of informal assistance is provided in the [Glossary](#).

51 Just over two-thirds (67.7%) of children (living in households) who needed assistance with communication received both formal and informal assistance with their communication, while almost one-quarter (22.6%) received informal assistance only.

52 A person's need for assistance is complex and can be met in a number of ways, including through formal and informal assistance or a combination of the two types. Overall, irrespective of the type of assistance needed with communication, almost three in five (58.8%) children with communication disability (living in households) had their need for communication assistance fully met while two in five (39.5%) had this need partly met by either one or both types of assistance (formal and/or informal).

### *Education*

53 Communication disability may affect a child's ability to participate or succeed in regular classes.<sup>3</sup> Of the 2.2 million children aged 5-12 years (living in households) who attended school in 2015, 4.1% (or 91,200 children) had communication disability. Almost half (47.1%) of these children attended a special class within a non-special school or attended a special school (24.0% and 23.8%, respectively).

54 Irrespective of the type of school they attend, children with communication disability (living in households) may receive special support. Of children with communication disability (living in households) who attended school in 2015, just over three-quarters (77.1%) received some form of special schooling support. These supports included special tuition (56.2%), a counsellor or disability support person (33.3%), and special assessment procedures (27.7%), equipment (22.6%) or transport arrangements (11.4%). Although many children were receiving support at school, a considerable proportion (43.4%) reported needing more.

### **ADOLESCENTS (AGED 13-17 YEARS)**

55 Adolescents with communication difficulties are known to be at risk for academic, social, emotional and behavioural problems.<sup>1</sup>

### *Level of communication disability*

56 According to the 2015 SDAC, 124,000 adolescents were living with disability, almost one-third of whom (31.4% or 38,900 people) had communication disability. The majority of these adolescents (85.9%) had profound or severe communication disability.

### *Main long-term health conditions*

57 The 2015 SDAC reported there were 38,900 adolescents with communication disability with one or more long-term health conditions which may have contributed to, or coexisted with, their communication disability. The most commonly reported main long-term health condition among adolescents with communication disability was 'autism and related disorders' (37.8%). Another commonly reported condition was 'other developmental/learning disorders' (14.9%).

### *Assistance needed and received*

58 Most (83.5% or 33,800 people) adolescents with communication disability (living in households) reported a need for formal and/or informal assistance with communication. Of these adolescents, around three in five (58.3%) reported a need for formal assistance.

59 Irrespective of the type of assistance needed with communication, just over three in five (62.1%) adolescents with communication disability (living in households) had their need for communication assistance fully met and almost two in five (38.5%) had this need partly met.

### *Education*

60 Providing support and services to adolescents with communication difficulties during their school years is important in helping them achieve their educational goals and employment prospects.<sup>1</sup>

61 Of the 1.4 million adolescents (living in households) who attended school in 2015, 36,800 (2.6%) had communication disability. Of these adolescents, most (79.6%) received some form of special schooling support, including special tuition (54.9%), a counsellor or disability support person (40.5%), special assessment procedures (37.8%) or equipment (22.8%).

## YOUNG ADULTS (AGED 18-24 YEARS)

62 Communication skills are essential to the success and wellbeing in many areas of a young adult's life. They can affect a person's ability to do well in further education, meet and maintain a relationship with a partner, secure a job, and many other aspects of life.<sup>1</sup>

### *Level of communication disability*

63 According to the 2015 SDAC, of the 175,900 young adults living with disability, almost one-quarter (21.4% or 37,600 people) had communication disability. Just over three-quarters (76.3%) of these young adults had profound or severe communication disability.

### *Main long-term health conditions*

64 The 2015 SDAC reported there were 37,600 young adults with communication disability with one or more long-term health conditions which may have contributed to, or coexisted with, their communication disability. Nearly one-third (32.2%) of these young adults reported their main long-term health condition as 'autism and related disorders'.

### *Assistance needed and received*

65 Of all young adults with communication disability (living in households) in 2015, just over two-thirds (67.4% or 26,000 people) reported a need for formal and/or informal assistance with their communication.

66 Irrespective of the type of assistance needed with communication, most (82.7%) young adults with communication disability (living in households) had their need for communication assistance fully met.

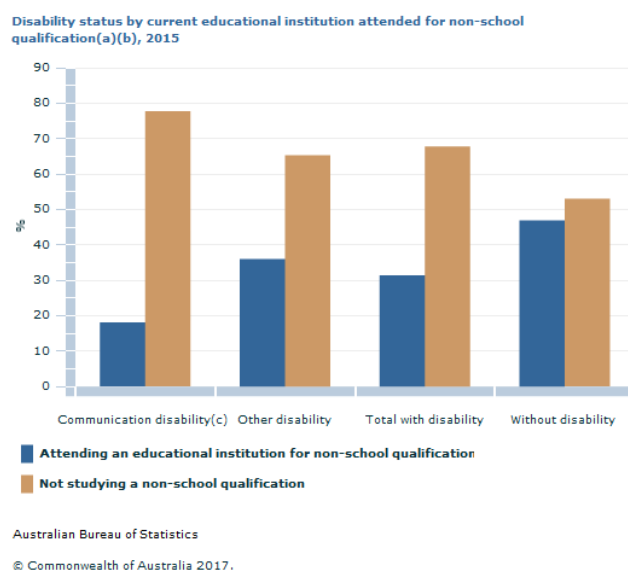
### *Education*

67 Many young adults choose to extend their education beyond school to expand their knowledge and skills. Those with communication disability may face barriers to higher education.

68 In 2015, young adults with communication disability had considerably lower participation rates in further education compared with other young adults. Among young adults with communication disability (living in

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

households), nearly one in five (18.1%) were attending an education institution, compared with just over one-third (36.0%) of those with other disability, and almost half (46.9%) of those without disability.



**Footnote(s):** (a) People aged 18-24 years. (b) Living in households. (c) Includes people who may or may not also have another disability.

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers-2015

### ADULTS (AGED 25-64 YEARS)

#### *Level of communication disability*

69 According to the 2015 SDAC, 1,915,000 adults were living with disability, one in nine of whom (11.3% or 215,700 people) had communication disability. Almost two-thirds (66.2%) of these adults had moderate or mild communication disability.

#### *Main long-term health conditions*

70 As in early life, adults with communication disability can have health conditions which may contribute to, or coexist with their communication disability. Of adults with communication disability, the most common main long-term health conditions reported were 'back problems' (8.8%), 'depression/mood affective disorders (excluding postnatal depression)' (6.7%) and 'intellectual disability' (6.1%).

71 However, when grouping all types of deafness or hearing loss together, it was the most prevalent main long-term health condition reported (17.1% or 36,900 people) by adults with communication disability. Types of deafness and hearing loss include: noise induced deafness/hearing loss (6.0%), congenital deafness/hearing loss (5.9%) or deafness/hearing loss (5.1%).

#### *Assistance needed and received*

72 In 2015, just over one-quarter (28.1% or 57,500 people) of adults with communication disability (living in households) reported a need for formal and/or informal assistance with communication.

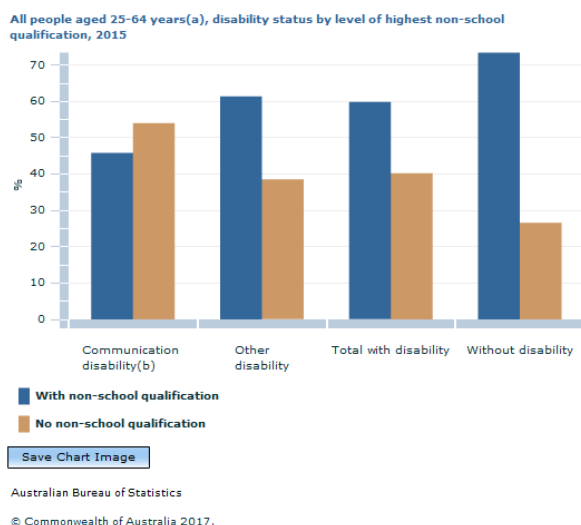
73 Irrespective of the type of assistance needed with communication, most (82.8%) adults with communication disability (living in households) had their need for communication assistance fully met.

#### *Education*

74 While many adults choose to further their education in adulthood, most have completed their main schooling by age 25.<sup>9</sup> According to the 2015 SDAC, among those living in households, almost half (45.8%) of adults with

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

communication disability had a non-school qualification, compared to more than three in five (61.4%) of those with other disability, and most (73.4%) of those without disability.



**Annotation(s):** a) Living in households b) Includes people who may or may not also have another disability

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers - 2015

### OLDER AUSTRALIANS (AGED 65 YEARS AND OVER)

75 Many people develop communication disability as they age, such as hearing difficulties that can be helped with aids, to more complex difficulties associated with the onset of dementia.<sup>10</sup> Like most developed countries, Australia's population is ageing. The 2015 SDAC reported there were 3.5 million older Australians, representing one in every seven people (15.1%), increasing from 12.6% in 2003. In 2015, just over half (50.7%) of all older Australians reported living with disability.

#### *Level of communication disability*

76 Of the 1.8 million older Australians living with disability in 2015, two in five (41.9% or 753,400 people) had communication disability. Most (77.5%) of these older Australians had moderate or mild communication disability and almost one-quarter (22.4%) had profound or severe communication disability.

#### *Main long-term health conditions*

77 The 2015 SDAC reported there were 753,400 older Australians with communication disability with one or more long-term health conditions which may have contributed to, or coexisted with, their communication disability.

78 In 2015, there were 140,600 older Australians who reported a main condition related to deafness or hearing loss, such as 'deafness/hearing loss' (7.5%), 'noise induced deafness/hearing loss' (7.4%) or 'congenital deafness/hearing loss' (3.7%).

79 The most common main long-term health conditions among older people with communication disability were those associated with older age, such as 'arthritis and related disorders' (13.9%) and 'back problems' (8.3%), while around one in 12 older people with communication disability had dementia (8.3%). While it wasn't among the top main long-term health conditions reported by older Australians with communication disability, 2.3% reported their main long-term health condition as 'stroke'.

## AUSTRALIANS LIVING WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITY, 2015

### *Assistance needed and received*

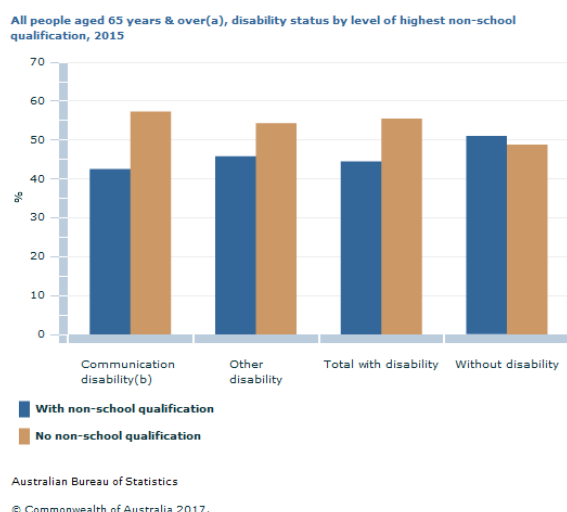
80 Older people were the least likely of all other Australians (living in households) to need assistance with their communication, with 59,500 (9.4%) older people with communication disability reporting a need for formal and/or informal assistance. This might be partially explained by the predominance of mild communication disability among older people or the prevalence of hearing difficulties among this group of people (a condition which may be alleviated with use of a hearing aid).

81 Of those older Australians (living in households) who needed assistance with their communication a small proportion (9.9% or 5,900 people) reported needing formal assistance and most (90.0% or 53,600 people) reported needing informal assistance.

82 Irrespective of the type of assistance needed with communication, the majority of older Australians with communication disability (living in households) had their need for communication assistance fully (93.8%) met.

### *Education*

83 According to the 2015 SDAC, among older Australians living in households, a considerable proportion (42.5%) with communication disability had a non-school qualification, similar to older people with other disability (45.8%) and those without disability (51.0%). The similarity may be reflective of many older people attaining their non-school qualification prior to developing communication disability in later years.



**Footnote(s):** (a) Living in households. (b) Includes people who may or may not also have another disability.

**Source(s):** ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers-2015

## LOOKING AHEAD

84 The ability to communicate is an essential foundation skill for learning, social interactions, work participation and community connectedness.

85 Information from the SDAC helps the Australian community understand the characteristics of people with communication disability and the concurrent long-term health conditions and types of restrictions they have and how they affect a person's ability to fully participate in community, social, economic and daily life.

86 This information can assist in planning timely and effective support and services for the benefit of all people with communication disability, their friends, family and community.

### ENDNOTES

- 1 Parliament of Australia, 2014, [\*Prevalence of different types of speech, language and communication disorders and speech pathology services in Australia\*](#) (accessed 26 September 2017)
- 2 Family & Community Services, 2015, [\*Complex communication needs\*](#) (accessed 3 October 2017)
- 3 Speech Pathology Australia, [\*Communication impairment in Australia\*](#) (accessed on 3 October 2017)
- 4 ABS [\*Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Older people \(cat. no. 4430.0\)\*](#).
- 5 2015 Speech Pathology Australia, [\*Augmentative and alternative communication\*](#) (accessed 3 October 2017)
- 6 Centre of Research Excellence in Child Language, 2015, [\*Social disadvantage and early language delay\*](#) (accessed 5 October 2017)
- 7 ABS [\*Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Disability \(cat. no. 4430.0\)\*](#), 2015
- 8 ABS [\*Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers: Autism in Australia \(cat. no. 4430.0\)\*](#), 2015
- 9 Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015, [\*National report on schooling in Australia\*](#) (accessed on 23 October 2017)
- 10 Speech Pathology Australia, [\*Speech pathologists working with older people\*](#) (accessed 3 October 2017)

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