



Children and young people with disability: What the data shows and what is missing

Response from Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)

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What are the biggest challenges in disability data about children and young people?

Information about children and young people with disability is spread across multiple administrative datasets, including the NDIS, NCCD and employment data. This makes it difficult to compare data or build a complete picture.

- Intersectional data is particularly hard to find. For example, on First Nations, LGBTIQ+, regional and remote, and multicultural children and young people with disabilities.
- Longitudinal tracking across time remains limited, making it difficult to understand how outcomes change as children grow.
- Strong qualitative data exist (often produced by universities, communities and advocacy organisations), but they are not well connected to quantitative datasets.
- The result is that we are often only getting parts of the picture of what shapes experiences and outcomes for children and young people with disability.

How can systems such as education and the NCCD better capture children's experiences and support needs?

Better data collection needs to start early (through Early Childhood Education and Care and the NDIS) before children enter school systems.

- More consistency is needed between schools in how and what they report. This includes better oversight of the categories and definitions used to collect data.
- Schools need to work with students, families, and allied health specialists to ensure that reporting is both participant-led and evidence-based.
- The NCCD could be improved by enabling students and families to provide direct input, rather than relying solely on the school as the conduit of data. A 360-degree review approach that captures multiple perspectives is a best practice in other sectors.
- Despite DRC Recommendation 7.2 (which is to prevent the inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline against students with disability), students with disability are still disproportionately excluded through formal and informal suspension, expulsion, and day-to-day practices.
- To understand the level of exclusion, NCCD data on disability needs to be matched with state and territory data on exclusion practices. Definitions and reporting requirements would need to be standardised across jurisdictions, with linkages created between local and national datasets.

What is currently missing from disability data about children and young people, and what needs to change?

- Children and young people need to be consulted on disability definitions.
- More consistent and strengths-based definitions are needed to enable comparison across datasets.
- Intersectional demographic questions need to be embedded in data collection to enable disaggregation.
- More data is needed on areas that matter to children and young people, including their qualitative experiences of education, health and employment systems, and their contributions and capacity, such as social and community participation.
- There is a growing cohort of children and young people being homeschooled and unschooled. This is not by choice, but out of necessity to opt out of a system that has harmed them. This group is missing from the current data.

Further reading

Resources recommended by CYDA

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2025). Children and young people with disability, 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/children-and-young-people-disability-2022>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024). Autism in Australia, 2022. <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022>
- Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (2025). School students with disability. <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/school-students-with-disability>
- Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (2026). Current higher education data analysis. <https://www.adcet.edu.au/he-data-analysis>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025). Young people in employment. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/australias-disability-strategy/outcomes/employment-and-financial-security/young-people-in-employment>
- Children and Young People with Disability Australia (2025). Three in four disabled students are bullied or excluded at school. <https://cyda.org.au/three-in-four-disabled-students-are-bullied-or-excluded-at-school-and-its-getting-worse-new-survey-reveals/>
- O'Flaherty, M., et al. (2024). Australian children with disabilities' unmet support needs. DOI: 10.14264/db88eeb <https://doi.org/10.14264/db88eeb>
- Productivity Commission (2024). A path to universal early childhood education and care. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/childhood/report/>
- Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning (2023). Student experience survey. [https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/student-experience-survey-\(ses\)](https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/student-experience-survey-(ses))