

# Adapted Physical Activity In Australia



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## Introduction

On August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2005 the population of Australia was projected to be 20, 373, 483 people. Of this population around 19% has a disability [ABS, 1998 *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings*]. This equates to about one in five people, or in real terms 4 074 696 people. This is a large body of people to address with respect to sport, education, rehabilitation and all other facets of life. Australia, like many other countries world wide has a checkered past when it comes to successfully including programs and facilities for disabilities. Things continue to improve, and this can mostly be attributed to the momentous shift in attitudes that has come about primarily in the last 20 years or so. The literature suggests that in particular two events heralded the arrival of the social model of disability in Australia, the Declaration of Rights of Disabled Persons by the United Nations in 1974 and the international year of Disabled Persons in 1981. The social model continues to gain momentum in Australia, while the medical model of attributing the burden of disability to the person, not the environment, stagnates. People continue to embrace the concept that attitudes have to change if the construction of society is ever to become fully inclusive and organizations, committees and companies have opened all over Australia in order to do just that- and they target all facets of life and vary across the spectrum of people with a disability, irrespective of age, severity of disability or gender. Another interesting point is that much of the research and the input within Australia comes from individuals with a disability, Robinson and Adam believe this to show a reinterpretation of disability, changing not only the way others view disability but the way individuals with a disability view themselves, allowing them to discuss and debate disability, handicap and impairments (Robinson and Adams,2003).

In order to understand the current structure and organization of disability in Australia we must first present an overview of the governing bodies responsible for the provision of services and opportunities for people with disabilities. The federal government overseas most legislation and governs the major sporting organization- the Australian Sports commission, and within this commission the Disability Sport Unit. Australia is comprised of 6 states 2 territories, each of these has a state government which overseas the running and funding of programs within their area. At times these organizations will overlap and the lines become blurred but generally there are particular roles that each play.

This paper will endeavor to look at the current position of Australia in relation to issues of Education, Recreation, Elite Sport, Rehabilitation, and Employment. Where necessary it will present a brief look at the history of the field where the process of change is relevant. Furthermore within each of these areas an overview will be presented, where the literature permits, on the organisation of these fields, the burden of cost to each individual, where the research presently stands in these fields and if any questions present themselves, or if any gaps are identified, where Australia might look to go from here.

## Education

In order to fully comprehend the situation of physical education and disability in Australia this paper will seek to identify the current position of both the physical education system and how disability fits in but also the extent of training that exists for the purveyors of physical education in this country.

Education in Australia is governed by the education department within each state or territory. It includes primary school (grades 1-7) and secondary (high) school (grades 8-12). Attendance of schooling is compulsory until the age of 15, with most students electing to continue through to grade 12. Within public school education, tuition is free, however parents may be expected to provide some funds for special events or training. Private education does present cost to the parent/ guardian of the child, however this paper will essentially be concerned with the public system. Within this public system there are laws that govern the rights of children with a disability but the extent of these laws varies from state to state. Below is a table that outlines the basic status of the different states of Australia in relation to where the individual education departments stand on inclusion. It shows what the law expects but it also gives a quick summary of what actually happens within the schools.

	Legislation	Policies
NSW	<p>Education and Public Instruction Act 1987</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>no child has a legally enforceable right to education</li> <li>a child can be exempted from education because of a temporary or permanent ailment</li> </ul>	<p>The Department's current policy is one of integrating the student into the mainstream system wherever possible and practicable where it is in the best interests of the child.</p>
ACT	<p>Education Ordinance 1937</p> <p>ACT Schools Authority Ordinance 1976</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>every child should attend school unless there is good reason not to</li> </ul>	<p>Departmental policy is to educate all children together as far as practicable, but not to require children with special needs and others to be taught together in circumstances which would educationally disadvantage any of the students.</p>
QLD	<p>Education Act 1964-74</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>special education services may be provided</li> </ul>	<p>The Department supports a policy of integrating children with disabilities in regular schools where it is in the best interests of the student to do so.</p>
NT	<p>Education Act 1979</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exemptions at the Minister's</li> </ul>	<p>Departmental policy is, if it is at all possible, for a child to receive an appropriate education in a regular classroom. Only when this mainstream experience is demonstrated to be not in the best interests of the child would a</p>

	discretion	less integrated placement be sought. Where such an alternative placement is warranted, a full range of support services should be available.
SA	<p>Education Act 1972</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• amendments to be introduced concerning compulsory attendance and the right to an education</li> </ul>	Consultations in SA indicated that school principals have their own agenda that differs from that of the Department of Education, and results in some schools not facing the responsibility of integration.
WA	<p>Education Act 1928</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allows for exemptions based on infirmity</li> </ul>	The Policy of Children in Need of Special Support aims to "enable handicapped children to receive an appropriate education in an integrated setting in regular schools."
VIC	<p>Education Act 1958</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rights of all children to an education</li> </ul>	Principals accept children for enrolment regardless of disability, but then suspend attendance pending allocation of additional resources.

Education for children with disabilities has changed substantially over the last 100 years in Australia. In the first 50 years of the last century, schooling was segregated for disabilities with the first schools opening for children who were deaf or visually impaired, then schools for intellectual impairment were formed. This trend continued through the 1920's although about this time there were special classes set up within regular schools to cater for disabilities. Generally though, special schools and 'hospital' schools were the way children with disabilities were educated. This continued until the 1970's. At this time the state governments began to take an interest in the education of children with disabilities and we began to see instances of inclusion, where children with disabilities were encouraged to attend 'regular' schools and were assisted with additional teachers, usually with some special training. Around 1976 there was a marked event where a minister for special education in Australia was appointed and integration became well known in most states. By 1980, all states of Australia began encouraging, where possible, integration of children with disabilities into local schools. It was around this time that additional training became available for teachers in special education. Special schools do still exist for children who require intensive support however most children with disabilities attend regular schools in their local areas. At this point in Queensland, evaluations are now performed by a system called EAP (Educational Adjustment Profile). This profile tells the department of education what the requirements are for children within each school. The required assistance is then determined on the basis of these results and specialists are provided as needed.

The next important issue to consider is that of 'specially trained teachers' within Australia. All teachers need to complete a degree in Education at a recognised tertiary institution, and most will have some exposure to adapted physical activity in this

degree, if not in the lectures, possibly in practicum experience, however given the statistics that a large percentage of children with a disability are currently being educated in mainstream school settings it can easily be argued that this is not enough. Specialised physical education teachers graduating from the University of Queensland, as of 2005 no longer have to take any adapted physical activity subjects.

There are post graduate and master's degrees available to provide continuing education for teachers to work in adapted physical activity, however these graduates generally move into employment in special education schools, so when considering the large and continuing push for integration within schools, it becomes obvious that this is not addressing the issue of mainstream teachers being currently inadequately educated to provide lessons that are fully inclusive. There are programs such as those run by Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association in Queensland that operate on the basis of several aims. They run workshops for teachers and students and general public on disability awareness and principles of inclusion to expand knowledge. They also run school visits which entail a general talk to the students and then exposure to disability sport, perhaps either a demonstration by athletes from their area, or an opportunity for the children to try using a wheelchair and participating in games. The aim is to increase awareness and exposure to disability within communities and while no research could be obtained to support it, from the experience of the author of this paper, it is a program which assists in promoting positive attitudes towards people with disabilities to a young age group, when their experiences are forming their belief systems for the future.

## **Recreation**

In the early 1980s, largely due to pressure from the community, the Australian Government began a review of services for people with disabilities, which led to the Disability Services Act 1986. People who provided services within the community were required to ensure that people with disabilities would also have access to these services. In 2005 the service provision of programs accessible to people with disabilities is broad, varied and in general adequately funded. Within state organisations such as the QLD organisation, Sporting Wheelies and Disabled association, programs providing recreational opportunities for adults and children with disabilities are largely subsidised (Sporting wheelies and disabled association are able to provide this through a small percentage of government support and a telemarketing fundraising system and sponsorship). They provide come and try days for people to get involved in sports, water sports days, an annual ski trip, abseiling, hot air ballooning, concerts, restaurant trips and other activities, all for a very nominal fee. They also run a fully accessible gym for people with a disability wishing to engage in resistance activity. Gym instructors are fully qualified with tertiary degrees in Human Movement Studies and generally, if not always, have a background or interest in disability sport.

There are Australia wide organisations such as, Sailability, Riding for the disabled and other organisations catering solely for people with disabilities. Other recreational organisations that provide recreation for able bodied persons generally also provide

access for people with disabilities. The creation of overseeing bodies such as the Disability Sport Unit within the Australian Sports Commission ensure that there are equal opportunities available for people with disabilities that are both integrated and parallel. A point to note is that while these opportunities exist, in 1996 research was done that showed that people with disabilities were not utilising the existing programs. Further research was proposed to attempt to address why this was the case, whether the programs were not fully accessible due to cost or equipment or whether they were generally unknown to the public, or whether other barriers existed, however no follow up research appears to have been conducted. It is thought and hoped that in the decade since this study was reported participation levels have increased, but it points towards the necessity of evaluating the programs that do exist in Australia and ensuring that they are available and accessible to the maximum number of people.

## **Adapted Employment**

In Australia in 1998 53% of people with disabilities were employed compared to 80% of people without disabilities who were employed. Currently there are numerous organisations existing to assist people with disabilities with employment issues. Disability services Australia is a main one and a federal government initiative, and it is assisted by Centrelink in the administration of these services. They provide individual assistance to people with disabilities through job searches and education opportunities as well as addressing the issues on a broader platform by providing incentives to businesses for employing individuals with disabilities. There has been research done on performance ratings to campaign to employers the benefits of employing people with a disability. 98% of employees with a disability rated average or better in work safety, 90% were average or better on job performance and businesses saw increases in staff retention rates and increased staff morale. In 2005 there has been much focus and controversy on the government's new plan to increase employment rates of individuals with disabilities. Currently there exists a system in Australia whereby individuals can receive a set pension if they meet minimum disability criteria. The amount is set but if an individual earns money from employment they then receive less benefits. While the pension is not large the government is concerned it is enough to discourage people with disabilities to look for work, instead they opt to stay with the maximum pension. The reforms are proposed to affect 75 000 people with a disability.

The recent reforms are considerable in the state of NSW as well, whereby individuals can receive assistance from the government to attend Adult Training Learning and Support programs or Post School options. The goal of these programs is to enable individuals, where possible, to gain employment. The government, again having assessed these programs has proposed to cut this funding in an attempt to more strongly encourage a return to work. The debate still rages on with many protesting that this greatly disadvantages those with severe disabilities, parents/ carers have expressed their concerns as some have had to cut working hours or resign to now be at home, in lieu of the programs. There do appear to have been large cuts as funding drops from about \$19,000 a year to a maximum of \$13,500 for the most disabled.

## Elite sport

Elite sport for athletes with a disability in Australia has moved forward in leaps and bounds since our introduction to the international scene in 1960. The number of Australian Paralympic athletes continues to grow, from 7 athletes in 1960 to over 140 in Athens in 2004. These athletes compete at the highest level and are organised by the Australian Paralympic Committee. The APC has squads for all IPC sanctioned sports and within these squads are Paralympic Preparation Programs (PPP). PPP athletes come into one of three levels. Level 1 athletes are fully funded to attend any APC sanctioned event, level 2 athletes receive 50% of all costs covered and level 3 athletes are generally classified as development athletes and invited to attend events however do not receive funding. The level at which an athlete sits is determined by times and performances. For example for individual sports like swimming and athletics, those that are a medal chance are placed in level one. If athletes are ranked around the 5-8 mark are level 2 and level 3's are generally those who are not ranked but show promise and potential. With team sports such as basketball, those on the starting line up in the Australian team are provided with level 1 funding, while others are classified as developmental and receive level 2 or 3. Athletes may also receive scholarships for the Australian Institute of Sport however these are classically few and far between. Also a point to note is that following the Paralympics in Sydney in 2000 the APC has adopted a process of mainstreaming, which sees mainstream sports being responsible for the preparation of their athletes to Paralympic level. Sports mainstreamed include: Athletics; Cycling; Basketball; Yachting; Table Tennis; Tennis; and Swimming. The APC will expand this list during 2005-2009.

Each individual state and territory also has an academy or institute of sport which while providing for able bodied athletes also cater to athletes with a disability. For example with the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS), if athletes in individual sports are ranked in the top 8 in Australia they are eligible for a scholarship, as are athletes in an Australian team ranked in the top 6 in the world, eg. Australian men's basketball team are ranked number 2 at the time of writing of this paper and therefore any Queensland athletes in this team would receive a scholarship from the QAS. It is interesting to note that in Queensland, athletes with a disability who receive a scholarship receive the same funding as athletes without a disability. While they may receive the same funding it is worthwhile to note at this point that the publicity and recognition of paralympic athletes is minimal. Studies have been done wherein members of the public were asked to identify Australian sporting personalities and the paralympic athletes were generally unknown. Louise Savage is the name most often picked. While our able bodied basketball team is lower in world rankings than the wheelchair basketball team, the able bodied games are more often televised. Paralympic sports are less well known in the wider community.

While this covers the athletes, another crucial part of elite sport organisation in Australia are the organisations that look after the different sports and coordinate the events. Australian Athletes With a Disability (AAWD) is a national organisation that is responsible for overseeing the following organisations, Wheelchair Sports Australia, Cerebral Palsy Sports and Recreation Federation of Australia and the Australian Sports Organisation for the Disabled. The AAWD also aims to encourage and deliver

pathways for coaches, officials and classifiers to reach international level. This is traditionally an underdeveloped area in Australia with limited numbers, however, both the national organisations and state organisations are working hard to change this.

## **Rehabilitation**

Rehabilitation in Australia is varied depending on the stage of the injury/ disability. Generally early intervention programs are hospital based and now are increasingly multi-professional, including health providers from a spectrum of backgrounds, including occupational therapy, physiotherapy, medical professionals, and social workers. This allied health approach has been shown by the research to encourage better outcomes. An added benefit of rehabilitation programs that are hospital based in Queensland is visits by staff from Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association. These weekly visits to both the spinal injury unit and the brain injury units provide participants with exposure to sporting activities and recreational pursuits that are available to them, while providing relief from intensive medical treatments and increasing morale. These programs also work to change false beliefs or negative attitudes individuals may have had to disability.

There are also community based programs available to people with disabilities. Research continues at the University of Queensland to determine the best methods of delivery for programs whether they are home based or community based, and what barriers need to be overcome to ensure they are most effective, both with outcomes and cost effectiveness for participants.

WorkCover is an organisation that insures businesses for circumstances in which an employee is injured or disabled in the work environment. Historically this has simply covered medical expenses and physiotherapy, however there is a growing trend of allowing the implementation of physical conditioning programs by qualified exercise physiologists, these are generally rehabilitation programs lasting 6 to 12 weeks that entail the provision of either a gym based or a home based strengthening and stretching program. These types of programs are also available in a motor vehicle accident environment and the cost of the programs is covered by a compulsory third party insurer. The aim of these programs is generally to address deconditioning and weakness attributed to injury or disability as well as providing education about exercise and physical activity to promote self management at the cessation of the supervised program. While these programs are only implemented by tertiary qualified exercise physiologists, in Australia we again face the issue of less-than-perfect education with respect to adapted physical activity. Professionals are instructed in anatomy and physiology and musculoskeletal conditions, however this does not include knowledge of disability and necessary adaptations to exercise and physical activity, as courses are not generally mandatory for adapted physical activity.

## **Research**

Australia continues to attempt to address gaps in the field of adapted physical activity in both academic research and site research within recreation, employment and rehabilitation environments. By evaluating the programs that exist, it is hoped that the

services can continue to improve. Programs and organizations exist specifically to investigate issues relating to disability and health, such as the Centre of National Research on Disability and Rehabilitation Medicine (CONROD). There are also opportunities in most universities in Australia to complete post graduate, masters degrees or doctorate's in the field of exercise science and rehabilitation. One field within adapted physical activity in Australia that continues to remain of interest to researchers is adapted physical activity and Indigenous Australians. There is substantial information and statistics representing the issues of high rates of disability within the aboriginal population and poor service provision to areas in rural Australia. The reasons for this, while important are largely varied and present a paper all in themselves. Only in the last two years in Australia have researchers attempted to address the rising issue by implementing guidelines for community based rehabilitation. This has essentially arisen from a forum in 2003 which acknowledged that rehabilitation programs for disabilities in rural and remote Australia were poorly tailored and inadequate. This is an issue that needs to be addressed and will certainly be a focus of research in Australia in the coming years.

## **Conclusion.**

There is no doubt that society's views with respect to people with disabilities has shifted over the last few decades. It is now obvious that viewing disability within a medical model stifles change, if you center on the disability of the person there is no room to move however the social model enables us to observe the interactions of people within the environment. This provides boundless opportunities for progress, we can now address infrastructure of the environment, laws and rights of individuals and while slightly more difficult, society attitudes and beliefs can also be tackled and changed. Australia continues to fight for equality in all aspects of employment, sport, recreation and rehabilitation. Organisations offer all manner of services and try and encourage society to look at what individuals can do- not what they can't. Some slogans used by organizations within Australia are No Labels. No Limits. and Nothing About Us Without Us. All run with the idea that whether someone has a disability or not, they reserve the right to make their own decisions about issues that concern them. Research in Australia will continue to address adapted physical activity as Australia strives to become fully inclusive. There is still some work to be done in the education system as educators and administrators seem to be of the belief that while the principles are there, it appears there is at best a loss of direction towards inclusion and at worst a loss of commitment. They cite booming numbers; ever-tightening budget constraints; poor accountability in self-managing schools; funding fluctuations; staff cuts and the dismantling of specialist centres; poor training and professional support; and internal departmental turmoil for the struggles that we currently face in the journey towards inclusion.

However, Australia still seems to be doing well overall and society views and attitudes continue to shift towards a perception which facilitates ability rather than disability which shows infinite promise for the years to come.

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Australian Athletes with a Disability

<http://www.sports.org.au/>

Australian Government- department of Family and Community Services

<http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/disabilities/access-nav.htm>

Australian Paralympic Committee

[http://www.paralympic.org.au/apc\\_sub.asp?id=221](http://www.paralympic.org.au/apc_sub.asp?id=221)

Australian Sports commission

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/dsu/index.asp>

Centre of National Research of Disability and Rehabilitation Medicine

<http://www.uq.edu.au/conrod/>

Disability Service Australia

<http://www.dsa.org.au>

Riding For the Disabled

<http://www.rda.org.au/>

Sailability

<http://www.sailability.org/au/australia/>

Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association

<http://www.sportingwheelies.org.au/>