



Graceville Inc

Sailing for People with Disability

Understanding our sailor clients and their disabilities

Information for volunteers

July 2016

INDEX

Introduction	4
What disability means	4
Disability in Australia	4
Support needs of people with a disability	5
Disability and employment	5
Disability and education.....	5
Disability and the community	5
Disability and financial circumstance.....	5
Different types of disabilities	6
Types of intellectual disabilities	6
Types of physical disabilities	6
Types of sensory disabilities.....	6
Types of mental illnesses.....	6
Fragile X syndrome (FXS).....	6
Down syndrome	7
Developmental delay	8
Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS)	8
Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)	9
Acquired brain injury	9
Spinal cord injury	10
Spina bifida.....	10
Cerebral palsy.....	10
Cystic fibrosis (CF)	11
Epilepsy	12
Multiple sclerosis (MS).....	12
Muscular dystrophy	12
Tourette syndrome	13
Dwarfism	13
Bipolar disorder.....	14
Depression	14
Anxiety	14
Schizophrenia.....	15
Anorexia nervosa	15
Bulimia nervosa.....	15

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	16
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	16
Impulse control disorder (ICD) and addiction.....	16
Body dysmorphic disorder	17
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD).....	17
Blindness and low vision	18
Hearing loss.....	18
Auslan Signbank	19
Sensory processing disorder	21
Using respectful disability terminology and language	21
How to talk to people with disabilities	22

Introduction

When a carer entrusts a sailor to us at Sailability we assume a special responsibility. Something more than a duty of care our role is to provide the best possible experience for the sailor during our shared time. This is a 'cut and paste' product drawn from the pages of a number of websites in Australia and overseas. It commences with a broad definition of 'disability'; provides disability facts; describes the attributes of the various disabilities; includes information about Auslan, the official sign language used in Australia; and concludes with some simple do and do-nots. House with No Steps has a wealth of information and is extensively quoted, supplemented by extracts from other sites.

What disability means

A disability is a condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual of their group. The term is often used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental illness, and various types of chronic disease. This usage has been described by some disabled people as being associated with a medical model of disability.

Persons with disabilities, "the world's largest minority", have generally poorer health, lower education achievements, fewer economic opportunities and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This is largely due to the lack of services available to them (like information and communications technology (ICT), justice or transportation) and the many obstacles they face in their everyday lives. These obstacles can take a variety of forms, including those relating to the physical environment, or those resulting from legislation or policy, or from societal attitudes or discrimination.

(UN <http://www.un.org/en/events/disabilitiesday/background.shtml>)

Disability is thus not just a health problem. It is a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person's body and features of the society in which he or she lives. Overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires interventions to remove environmental and social barriers.

(WHO <http://www.who.int/topics/disabilities/en/>)

Disability in Australia

- 1 in 5 Australians have a disability. Of these, just under 1.4 million have severe or profound core activity limitation ^[3]
- Every week, 5 Australians sustain a spinal cord injury ^[2]
- Every week 10 - 15 Australians sustain a severe brain injury ^[2]
- Every 13 hrs, a child is born with cerebral palsy ^[2]
- 1 in 1000 children born each year will have Down Syndrome ^[2]
- Every 7 hrs, a child is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder ^[2]
- Every 2 hrs, a child will be diagnosed with an intellectual disability ^[2]
- In 2099, it is estimated that approximately 4 million people will have a severe or profound disability in Australia – more than triple the current number ^[2]

Support needs of people with a disability

- 2.4 million people with disability need assistance with at least one broad area of activity ^[3]
- 61% of people with a disability, and 47% of people with a profound core activity limitation reported that their needs were fully met ^[3]

Disability and employment

- 15% of people within 'prime working age', aged 15 – 64, have a disability ^[1]
- Australia ranks 21 out of 29 OECD countries for labour force participation of people with a disability ^[2]
- 19% of people with a disability who are employed, work as professionals ^[1]
- 53% of people with a disability aged 15-64yrs are currently employed, compared with 83% of people without a disability ^[3]
- 36% of people with a severe or profound disability are employed ^[3]
- People with a disability are more likely to run their own business, 13%, than those without a disability, 10% ^[1]

Disability and education

- 36% of people with a disability aged 18-64yrs, have completed Year 12, compared with 60% of those without a disability ^[3]
- 50% of school children with a disability receive additional support including tuition, and access to counsellors or support workers ^[3]
- 25% of people with a profound or severe disability aged 15 – 64 have completed Year 12 ^[2]

Disability and the community

- People with a profound disability are 9 times less likely to participate in activities outside the home ^[4]
- Nearly 4 in 5 people with disability aged 15-64 years, participated in a cultural, recreational or sporting activity away from home in the previous 12 months (79%) ^[3]

Disability and financial circumstance

- 45% of those with a disability in Australia are living either near or below the poverty line, more than double the OECD average of 22% ^[2]
- People with a disability in Australia are 2.7 times more likely to be at risk of poverty than other OECD countries ^[2]

^[1] [Australian Bureau of Statistics. Disability, Australia, 2009 \(cat. no. 4446.0\) and Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings, Australia, 2009 \(cat. no. 4430.0\).](#)

^[2] [Price Waterhouse Coopers, 2011. 'Disability expectations - Investing in a better life, a stronger Australia'.](#)

^[3] [Australian Bureau of Statistics. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2012 \(cat. no. 4430.0\)](#)

^[4] [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2007 \(cat. no. 4159.0\)](#)

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwns.com.au/Resource-centre/disability-statistics>)

Different types of disabilities

There are many different types of disabilities which loosely fall into 4 separate categories - intellectual, physical, sensory, and mental illness.

Types of intellectual disabilities

An intellectual disability may mean difficulty communicating, learning, and retaining information. They include Down syndrome, Fragile X syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, and developmental delays.

Types of physical disabilities

Physical disability may affect, either temporarily or permanently, a person's physical capacity and/or mobility. They include MS, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, brain or spinal cord injury, epilepsy, and muscular dystrophy.

Types of sensory disabilities

Sensory disabilities affect one or more senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste or spatial awareness. They include autism, blindness, and hearing loss.

Types of mental illnesses

A mental illness affects a person's thinking, emotional state and behaviours. They include bipolar, depression, schizophrenia, and eating disorders.

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwms.com.au/Resource-centre/Types-of-disabilities>)

There are many types of intellectual disability which can involve difficulty communicating, learning, and retaining information

An intellectual disability may be caused by a genetic condition, problems during pregnancy and birth, health problems or illness, and environmental factors.

About 3% of Australians have an intellectual disability, making it the most common primary disability ([Qld Gov](#)). An intellectual disability is characterised by an IQ below 70 (the average IQ is 100), and significant difficulty with daily living such as self-care, safety, communication, and socialisation.

Fragile X syndrome (FXS)

FXS is the most common known cause of an inherited intellectual disability worldwide. FXS is a genetic condition caused by a mutation (a change in the DNA structure) in the X chromosome.

People born with Fragile X syndrome may experience a wide range of physical, developmental, behavioural, and emotional difficulties, however, the level of severity can be very varied. Some common signs include a developmental delay, intellectual disability, communication difficulties, anxiety, ADHD, and behaviours similar to autism such as hand flapping, difficulty with social interactions, difficulty processing sensory information, and poor eye contact ([Better Health](#)).

Boys are usually more affected by the syndrome than girls - it affects around 1 in 3,600 boys and between 1 in 4,000 – 6,000 girls ([Better Health](#))

Visit [The Fragile X Association of Australia](#) for more information

Down syndrome

Down syndrome is not a disease or illness, it is a genetic disorder which occurs when someone is born with a full, or partial, extra copy of chromosome 21 in their DNA. In Australia, approximately 270 children, or one in 1,100, are born with Down syndrome each year. Down syndrome is the most common genetic chromosomal disorder and cause of learning disabilities in children ([Mayo Clinic](#)).

Down syndrome can have a range of common physical and developmental characteristics as well as a higher than normal incidence of respiratory and heart conditions.

People with Down syndrome will have some level of intellectual and learning disabilities, but this can vary widely from one person to another.

Physical characteristics associated with Down syndrome can include a slight upward slant of the eyes, a rounded face, and a short stature. Despite some common physical characteristics, people with Down syndrome resemble other members of their family more than they resemble each other.

Down syndrome is a naturally occurring chromosomal arrangement that has always been a part of the human condition, exists in all regions across the globe and commonly results in variable effects on learning styles, physical characteristics or health.

In December 2011, the General Assembly declared 21 March as World Down Syndrome Day ([A/RES/66/149](#)). The General Assembly decided, with effect from 2012, to observe World Down Syndrome Day on 21 March each year, and Invites all Member States, relevant organizations of the United Nations system and other international organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to observe World Down Syndrome Day in an appropriate manner, in order to raise public awareness of Down syndrome.

(Source UN <http://www.un.org/en/events/downsyndromeday/>)

Find out more:

[Myths about Down syndrome](#)

[Blog: Growing up with Down syndrome](#)

People with Down syndrome have:

- some characteristic physical features
- some health and development challenges
- some level of intellectual disability.

Because no two people are alike, each of these things will vary from one person to another.

Down syndrome is the most common cause of intellectual disability that we know of. Everyone who has Down syndrome will have some level of intellectual disability. There will

be some delay in development and some level of learning difficulty. Because everyone is unique, the level of delay will be different for each person.

For many people with Down syndrome, speaking clearly can be difficult. Although a lot of people with Down syndrome speak fluently and clearly, many will need speech and language therapy to achieve this. Very often, people with Down syndrome can understand a lot more than they can express with words. This often means that their abilities are underestimated, which can make them feel frustrated.

(Source Down Syndrome Australia:
http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/what_is_down_syndrome.html)

Developmental delay

When a child develops at a slower rate compared to other children of the same age, they may have a developmental delay. One or more areas of their development may be affected including their ability to move, communicate, learn, understand, or interact with other children.

Children develop and mature at different rates. Sometimes children may not talk, move or behave in a way that's appropriate for their age but can progress more quickly as they grow. For others, their developmental delay may become more significant over time and can affect their learning and education.

Find out more about [developmental delays](#).

Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS)

Prader-Willi syndrome (PWS) is a rare and complex genetic disorder which affects around 1 in 10,000 - 20,000 people ([Better Health Channel](#)). This disability is quite complex and it's caused by an abnormality in the genes of chromosome 15.

One of the most common symptoms of PWS is a constant and insatiable hunger which typically begins at two years of age. People with PWS have an urge to eat because their brain (specifically their hypothalamus) won't tell them that they are full, so they are forever feeling hungry.

The symptoms of PWS can be quite varied, but poor muscle tone and a short stature are common. A level of intellectual disability is also common, and children can find language, problem solving, and maths difficult.

Someone with PWS may also be born with distinct facial features including almond-shaped eyes, a narrowing of the head, a thin upper-lip, light skin and hair, and a turned-down mouth.

Find out more:
[Myths about Prader-Willi syndrome](#)
[Blog: Kate's story about living with Prader-Willi syndrome](#)
[PWS Association of Australia](#)

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)

FASD refers to a number of conditions that are caused when an unborn foetus is exposed to alcohol. When a mother is pregnant, alcohol crosses the placenta from the mother's bloodstream into the baby's, exposing the baby to similar concentrations as the mother ([Better Health Channel](#)).

The symptoms can vary, however, may include distinctive facial features, deformities of joints, damage to organs such as the heart and kidneys, slow physical growth, learning difficulties, poor memory and judgement, behavioural problems, and poor social skills. Many cases are also often misdiagnosed as Autism or ADHD as they can have similarities such as learning and behavioural difficulties, poor memory, and hyperactivity.

It is not well understood how small amounts of alcohol can affect an unborn child, but it is important to note that there is no proven 'safe amount' of alcohol that women can drink during pregnancy. The World Health Organisation recommends that mothers-to-be, or those planning on conceiving, should completely abstain from alcohol.

Visit [NOFASD Australia](#) for more information

Environmental and other causes

Sometimes an intellectual disability is caused by an environmental factor or other causes. These causes can be quite varied but can include:

- Problems during pregnancy such as viral or bacterial infections
- Complications during birth
- Exposure to toxins such as lead or mercury
- Complications from illnesses such as meningitis, measles or whooping cough
- Malnutrition
- Exposure to alcohol and other drugs
- Trauma
- And even unknown causes

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwms.com.au/Resource-centre/Types-of-disabilities/Intellectual-disability/types-of-intellectual-disability>)

A spinal cord injury is a physical disability. Every week, 5 more Australians sustain a spinal cord injury and 10 to 15 sustain a severe traumatic brain injury.

Different types of physical disabilities may affect, either temporarily or permanently, a person's physical capacity and/or mobility.

Whilst there are tests available for some physical disabilities, they are often diagnosed through observations of a person's development, behaviour, and physical capabilities.

Physical disabilities are the most commonly reported disability in children, and they are more common in boys than in girls.

Acquired brain injury

Acquired brain injuries are due to any damage that occurs to the brain after birth. They can be caused through a wide range of factors including a blow to the head, stroke, alcohol or drugs, infection, disease such as AIDs or cancer, or a lack of oxygen.

It is common for many people with a brain injury to find that they are slower at processing information, planning, and solving problems. They may also experience changes to their behaviour and personality, physical and sensory abilities, or thinking and learning.

The effects of brain injuries and the disabilities they cause can be temporary or permanent.

Spinal cord injury

A spinal cord injury often causes a permanent physical disability. The spinal cord can become injured if too much pressure is applied and/or if the blood and oxygen supply to the spinal cord is cut. When the spinal cord has been damaged, it leads to a loss of function such as mobility or feeling.

For some people, a SCI results in paraplegia (loss of function below the chest), for others it leads to quadriplegia (loss of function below the neck).

Accidents account for 79% of spinal cord injuries in Australia – mostly caused by motor vehicle accidents (46%) and falls (28%). The other 21% are caused by a range of non-traumatic causes, like cancer, arthritis, infections, blood clots, and degenerative spinal conditions.

As well as affecting the ability to walk through paralysis, it may affect many areas of a person's body - such as the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, bladder and bowel function, temperature, and sensory abilities.

Find out more:

[Myths about spinal cord injuries](#)
[Spinal Cord Injuries Australia](#)

Spina bifida

Spina bifida is the incomplete formation of the spine and spinal cord in utero. It can cause the spinal cord and nerves to be exposed on the surface of the back, instead of being inside a canal of bone surrounded by muscle.

People with spina bifida experience a range of mild to severe physical disabilities including paralysis or weakness in the legs, bowel and bladder incontinence, hydrocephalus (too much fluid in the brain cavities), deformities of the spine, and learning difficulties.

The cause of spina bifida is not well understood, but it is likely caused by genetic and environmental factors. Adequate intake of folate by the mother in early pregnancy has been found to be a significant factor in preventing a child developing the disability.

(See also the general information booklet at Spina Bifida Queensland
<http://spinabifida.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Booklet-General.pdf>)

Cerebral palsy

Cerebral palsy is associated with movement, muscle tone, and posture - 'Cerebral' refers to the brain and 'palsy' means weakness or lack of muscle control.

Typically, it is due to an injury to the developing brain before or during birth, caused by a reduced blood supply and lack of oxygen to the brain. Illnesses during pregnancy such as rubella (the German measles), accidental injury to the brain, meningitis in young children, and premature birth can all be causes.

In Australia, over 90% of cerebral palsy was due to a brain injury while the mother was pregnant, or before one month of age, however, 10% of people develop the disability later in life, usually as a result of infections such as meningitis or encephalitis, stroke, or a severe head injury (Cerebral Palsy Alliance).

People with Cerebral palsy may experience epilepsy, and may have difficulty with awareness and comprehension.

Find out more:

[Myths about cerebral palsy \(CP\)](#)
[Cerebral Palsy Australia](#)

Children with cerebral palsy can have problems such as muscle weakness, stiffness, awkwardness, slowness, shakiness, and difficulty with balance. These problems can range from mild to severe. In mild cerebral palsy, the child may be slightly clumsy in one arm or leg, and the problem may be barely noticeable. In severe cerebral palsy, the child may have a lot of difficulties in performing everyday tasks and movement.

There are several different types of cerebral palsy:

Spastic cerebral palsy, Dyskinetic cerebral palsy - dystonia and athetosis, and Ataxic cerebral palsy. Some children have mixed cerebral palsy.

Information on the various types can be found in a publication produced by the Royal Childrens' Hospital, Melbourne titled: Cerebral Palsy an Information Guide for Parents. (See <http://ww2.rch.org.au/emplibrary/cdr/CPBooklet.pdf>)

Cystic fibrosis (CF)

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is an inherited genetic condition, which affects the body's respiratory, digestive, and reproductive systems. It specifically affects the mucus and sweat glands in the body, causing mucus to be thick and sticky. In the case of the lungs, this can clog the air passages and trap bacteria causing lung damage and recurrent infections.

In Australia, more than 1 in 25 people carry the cystic fibrosis gene, but being a carrier doesn't mean that you will also have CF itself ([Better Health Channel](#)).

A range of other symptoms are caused by the effects of CF on other parts of the body, including sinus infections, liver damage, diabetes, poor growth, diarrhoea, and infertility. In the case of the pancreas, the release of enzymes needed to digest food is prevented, which means people with CF must consume a very high calorie diet – 20 to 50% more each day than the recommended intake.

People with CF can also have low salt levels in the body which causes problems such as fatigue, cramps, and dehydration.

Find out more:

[Myths about cystic fibrosis](#)
[Cystic Fibrosis Australia](#)

Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological condition where a person has a tendency to have recurring seizures due to a sudden burst of electrical activity in the brain. Seizures can cause unusual movements, odd feelings or sensations, a change a person's behaviour, or cause them to lose consciousness.

The causes of epilepsy are not always known, however, brain injuries, strokes, cancer, brain infection, structural abnormalities of the brain, and other genetic factors can all cause epilepsy.

There are many different types of epilepsy and the nature and severity of seizures experienced by people can vary widely. Some people can control their seizures with medication and the condition is not lifelong for every person.

Visit [Epilepsy Australia](#) for more information.

Multiple sclerosis (MS)

MS occurs when the myelin sheath - protective tissue around nerve fibres in the body - becomes damaged, causing random patches or scars. The scars can interfere with messages sent through the central nervous system, affecting the brain, optic nerves, and spinal cord.

The symptoms of MS are very varied but can include fatigue, loss of motor control, tingling, numbness, visual disturbances, memory loss, depression, and cognitive difficulties.

The progress and severity of MS can be difficult to predict - it may progress very slowly for one person, but develop quickly in another.

Find out more:

[Myths about multiple sclerosis \(MS\)](#)
[MS Australia](#)

Muscular dystrophy

Muscular dystrophy is a group of disorders that lead to progressive and irreversible weakness and loss of muscle mass. There are more than 30 different types of muscular dystrophy, and each has a separate cause. They are all however genetic conditions, which means that they are caused by an alteration within the genetic makeup.

Signs and symptoms can be very varied however can include difficulty walking, trouble breathing or swallowing, restriction in joint motion, and heart and other organ problems.

Symptoms of the most common type of the disease appear in childhood, however, others do not become apparent until middle age or older.

Visit [MD Australia](#) for more information

Tourette syndrome

Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder which involves involuntary and repetitive vocalisations, sounds, and movements called tics. These tics are neurological not behavioural - which means a person with Tourette syndrome cannot control them.

Vocal tics can include sniffing, throat clearing, tongue clicking, grunting, or more rarely blurting out socially unacceptable words or phrases. Motor tics can include repetitive eye blinking, shoulder shrugging, nose twitching, head jerking, facial expressions, touching objects or other people, spinning around, imitating someone else's actions, or jumping up and down.

Tourette syndrome is typically diagnosed between the ages of 2 and 21. It is not known exactly what causes Tourette syndrome, but it is likely a combination of genetic, environmental, and neurochemical (chemicals of the brain) factors.

Find out more:

[Myths about Tourette syndrome](#)
[Tourette Syndrome Association of Australia](#)

Dwarfism

Dwarfism is short stature (abnormal skeletal growth) which can be caused by over 300 genetic or medical conditions. It is generally defined as an adult height of 4 feet 10 inches or less, with the average height of someone with dwarfism being 4 feet (Mayo Clinic).

In general, there are two categories for dwarfism:

1. Disproportionate dwarfism: where some parts of the body are smaller, whilst other parts are average or above-average.
2. Proportionate dwarfism where the body is averagely proportioned, and all parts of the body are small to the same degree

Children with dwarfism may experience a delay on developing motor skills, however, dwarfism does not have a link to any intellectual disability.

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwms.com.au/Resource-centre/Types-of-disabilities/Physical-disability/types-of-physical-disabilities>)

Different types of mental illness affect a person's thinking, emotional state and behaviours.

A mental illness may disrupt a person's ability to work, carry out daily activities and have satisfying personal relationships. They can find it hard to take part in social activities and may experience sensory challenges.

A mental illness can be permanent, temporary or come and go.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder used to be known as manic depression, and causes extreme mood swings including emotional highs (mania) as well as extreme lows (depression). These mood swings come in 'cycles' which can last days, weeks or even months ([Better Health Victoria](#)).

How people with bipolar are feeling also doesn't necessarily make sense in the context of what's going on around them. Some people experience emotions such as uncontrollable crying or excessive happiness without a cause.

Bipolar can be very variable, however, when episodes are extreme, they can also bring on suicidal thoughts and symptoms of psychosis. The person may be affected so much that they are unable to distinguish reality from fantasy ([Better Health Victoria](#)).

The causes of bipolar disorder are not fully understood but are likely to be a combination of genetics and other causes.

Find out more:

[Myths about bipolar disorder](#)

[Blog: Peter's story about living with bipolar disorder](#)

[Sane Australia](#)

Depression

Clinical depression is a mental illness which significantly affects the way someone feels, causing a persistent lowering of their mood and feelings of dejection and loss.

Depression has a variety of symptoms and will affect everyone in different ways such as feeling extremely sad, disturbed sleep, loss of interest and motivation, feeling worthless, loss of pleasure in activities, anxiety, changes in appetite or weight, physical aches and pains and impaired thinking or concentration. Depression makes it more difficult to manage from day to day.

While the exact cause of depression isn't known, it is generally due to a combination of recent events, other longer-term or personal factors, family history, drug and alcohol use, as well as changes within the brain itself.

Find out more:

[Blog: Christine's story about her son's battle with depression](#)

[Sane Australia](#)

Anxiety

Stress or worry can be common feelings for many, but anxiety is when these feelings continue for a more significant period of time without a specific cause, and are often more extreme.

The main features of an anxiety disorder are fears or thoughts that are chronic and distressing, and often interfere with daily living. Other symptoms can include panic attacks, trembling, sweating, difficulty breathing, feeling faint, rapid heartbeat, nausea, or avoidance behaviour.

Some of the causes or triggers of anxiety include:

- Environment
- Stressful situations
- History of anxiety in the family
- Trauma
- Physical health problems
- Substance abuse

Visit [beyond blue](#) for more information.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a mental illness which influences the way a person thinks, feels, and acts, often distorting their perception of reality. People affected by schizophrenia have one 'personality,' just like everyone else. It is a myth that those with schizophrenia have a 'split personality'.

If not receiving treatment, people with schizophrenia may experience persistent symptoms of psychosis. They can have hallucinations such as seeing things that are not really there, hearing disembodied voices, smelling odours that do not exist, and feeling sensations on the skin even if nobody is touching you. They can also have delusions which are false beliefs that seem logical to the person, strongly persist in their mind, and refuses to go away.

Other signs and symptoms can include low motivation, dulled emotions, rambling and disorganised speech, lack of desire to form social relationships, and a lack of ability to express emotion.

Find out more:

[Myths about schizophrenia](#)
[Sane Australia](#)

Anorexia nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder characterised by an abnormally low body weight, an extreme fear of gaining weight, and a distorted perception of body weight. People who have anorexia can restrict their eating, compulsively exercise, and misuse laxatives or diet aids, however, it is not connected to vanity or a lifestyle choice in any way.

Anorexia has one of the highest mortality rates of all mental illnesses, with 10-20% of people dying within 20 years from complications or suicide.

Visit [NEDC](#) for more information

Bulimia nervosa

Bulimia Nervosa is a serious mental illness which involves binge-eating (consuming abnormally large amounts of food), followed by compensatory behavior such as vomiting, over exercising, fasting, or misuse of laxatives.

The cycle of binge eating and purging/exercising, leads to intense feelings of guilt and shame for the person. This mental illness often goes undetected because those with bulimia are normal weight or slightly overweight, and they often hide the behaviours associated.

Visit [NEDC](#) for more information

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder where a person will experience thoughts and fears (obsessions) that lead to repetitive behaviours (compulsions). People with OCD are usually aware of the unreasonable nature of their obsessions and compulsions, however, feel unable to control it.

Some common obsessions include:

- Fear of germs, dirt, and poisons
- Fear of harm to yourself or others
- Excessive concern with symmetry, exactness, and orderliness
- Hoarding, or saving and collecting things

These obsessions lead to feelings of anxiety, disgust, and panic. Compulsions are the repetitive actions which are usually performed to prevent an obsessive fear from happening, to reduce anxiety, and to just make things feel right.

Some common compulsions can include:

- Excessive checking of items associated with safety such as locks and appliances
- Excessive cleaning, washing, and showering
- Touching, tapping or moving in a particular way or a number of times
- Repeating words or numbers a certain number of times

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental illness which can develop after someone experiences or witnesses a traumatic event which threatened their life or safety, or that of others around them. For example, events which can trigger PTSD include a physical or sexual assault, an accident, natural disasters, or war.

Someone with PTSD may experience feelings of intense fear, panic, helplessness, or horror. They can re-live the traumatic event and feel intense emotional or physical reactions when reminded of the event such as sweating and heart palpitations. Other symptoms include sleeping difficulties, lack of concentration, being easily startled, being constantly on the look out for danger, avoiding reminders of the event, and feeling emotionally numb.

It's not unusual for people with PTSD to experience other mental health problems at the same time such as depression, anxiety, and alcohol or drug use.

Impulse control disorder (ICD) and addiction

Impulse control disorder (ICD) is a class of disorders characterised by impulsivity and being unable to resist temptation which may harm oneself or others. For example, pyromania (deliberately starting fires), kleptomania (stealing), compulsive shopping, sexual compulsion (increased urge in sexual behaviour and thoughts), and compulsive gambling are examples of impulse control disorders.

Addiction and substance abuse can be of a variety of legal and illegal substances such as alcohol, drugs, gambling, prescription medicines (pain killers or sedatives), inhalants such as

household cleaners, and even internet usage. When someone becomes dependent, they can experience cravings or withdrawal symptoms when they stop.

Body dysmorphic disorder

Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a mental illness where people constantly worry about the way they look. They can believe that minor or non-existent 'flaws', are actually serious defects in their appearance. It is however not related to vanity.

These perceived flaws cause the person substantial distress, and this obsession impacts their ability to function in daily life. People often obsess over their appearance and body image, repeatedly check the mirror, groom themselves obsessively, constantly diet and over exercise, and seek reassurance.

It's not uncommon for people to seek out numerous cosmetic procedures to try to "fix" the perceived flaws, but are never satisfied.

Like many other mental illnesses, it's not known specifically what causes body dysmorphic disorder, and it is likely due to a combination of factors.

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwms.com.au/Resource-centre/Types-of-disabilities/mental-illness>)

Different types of sensory disabilities affect one or more senses; sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste or spatial awareness.

A sensory disability refers to a disability of the senses (e.g. sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste). As 95% of the information about the world around us comes from our sight and hearing, a sensory disability can affect how a person gathers information from the world around them.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Autism spectrum disorders are a lifelong developmental disability. They affect the way someone interacts with the world around them, as well as with other people. Around 1 in 200 Aussies have autism ([ABS, 2012](#)), and boys are four times more likely to have autism than girls.

The effects of autism are wide ranging and can include difficulties in social interaction and communication, restricted and repetitive interests and behaviours, and sensitivity to sensory experiences – noise, light, touch etc. As ASD can be very variable, the word 'spectrum' describes the range of difficulties that someone with autism may experience.

The cause of ASD is not well understood but it is a developmental disability thought to have neurological or genetic causes (or both).

Find out more:

[Myths about autism](#)

[Blog: Raising a son with autism](#)

[Autism Awareness Australia](#)

Autism is a lifelong neurological condition that manifests during early childhood, irrespective of gender, race or socio-economic status. The term Autism Spectrum refers to a range of

characteristics. Appropriate support, accommodation and acceptance of this neurological variation allow those on the Spectrum to enjoy equal opportunity, and full and effective participation in society.

Autism is mainly characterized by its unique social interactions, non-standard ways of learning, keen interests in specific subjects, inclination to routines, challenges in typical communications and particular ways of processing sensory information.

The rate of autism in all regions of the world is high and the lack of understanding has a tremendous impact on the individuals, their families and communities.

The stigmatization and discrimination associated with neurological differences remain substantial obstacles to diagnosis and therapies, an issue that must be addressed by both public policy-makers in developing nations, as well as donor countries.

Throughout its history, the United Nations family has celebrated diversity and promoted the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities, including children with learning differences and developmental disabilities. In 2008, the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) entered into force, reaffirming the fundamental principle of universal human rights for all. Its purpose is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. It is a solid tool to foster an inclusive and caring society for all and to ensure that all children and adults with autism can lead full and meaningful lives.

The United Nations General Assembly unanimously declared 2 April as World Autism Awareness Day ([A/RES/62/139](#)) to highlight the need to help improve the quality of life of those with autism so they can lead full and meaningful lives as an integral part of society.

(Source UN <http://www.un.org/en/events/autismday/background.shtml>)

Blindness and low vision

Blindness and low vision can occur as a result of a number of different diseases, conditions, or accidents. Some eye conditions are congenital (present at or near birth), while others are caused later in life. Vision loss can affect people of all ages, but it is more common with two thirds of people with vision loss being over the age of 65.

Some of other causes of vision impairment can include injury, eye defects, albinism, macular degeneration, diabetes, glaucoma, cataracts, and tumors. Whilst some forms of vision loss can be prevented and even reversed, others may develop as people age.

Visit [Vision Australia](#) for more information.

Hearing loss

Damage to any part of the external, middle, or inner ear can cause hearing loss which can range from being mild to profound.

If someone is born with hearing loss, this is known as congenital deafness, whereas if hearing loss occurs after birth is it known as adventitious deafness. The most common cause of adventitious deafness is noise.

Other causes of hearing loss can be quite varied and can include problems with the bones within the ear, damage to the cochlear nerve, genetic disorders, exposure to diseases in utero, age, trauma, and other diseases.

Visit [Deaf Australia](#) for more information.

Auslan Signbank

Auslan Signbank is a language resources site for Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Auslan is the language of the deaf community in Australia. Here you will find:

- a dictionary
- ability to search for signs related to medical and health topics
- ability to search for signs related to educational and teaching topics
- videos of deaf people using the listed Auslan signs
- information on the deaf community in Australia
- links to Auslan classes

The dictionary at Auslan Signbank allows you to type in a word and then watch the video signing of that word. See <http://www.auslan.org.au/dictionary/words/don't-1.html>

This website provides other material such as the signing alphabet:
<http://www.auslan.org.au/spell/twohanded.html>

The alphabet is shown on the next page.



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L



M



N



O



P



Q



R



S



T



U



V



W



X



Y



Z

Sensory processing disorder

Sensory processing disorder is a condition that causes difficulties receiving and responding to information from the senses including vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste.

Sensory information is sensed by the person, however, the brain perceives and analyses the information in an unusual way. It may affect one sense alone or it may affect multiple senses.

Someone with sensory processing disorder may have heightened or lowered sensitivity to stimuli such as tolerating light, being touched, sound, eye contact, and pain.

Sensory processing disorder can be a disorder on its own, however it can also be a common characteristic of other disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorders, dyslexia, MS, and Tourette syndrome.

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwms.com.au/Resource-centre/Types-of-disabilities/sensory-disability>)

Using respectful disability terminology and language

Some words that are used to describe people with a disability which were perhaps learnt while growing up, can be hurtful to a person.

Here are some of the right and wrong ways of talking about a person with a disability.

Words to avoid	Acceptable alternatives
Normal person	Person without a disability
Disabled, handicapped, invalid, special needs, defected, deformed	Person with a disability
Paraplegic, quadriplegic	Person with paraplegia, person with quadriplegia
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	Uses a wheelchair
Cripple, crippled, physically challenged	Physical disability
Dumb	Non-verbal
Dwarf, midget, little person, vertically challenged	Short-statured person
Insane, lunatic, maniac, mental patient, mental, psycho, psychopath, crazy, demented, skitzo	Person with a mental illness
Retarded, tard, moron, intellectually challenged	Person with an intellectual disability
Mongol, mongoloid, mong, downsy	Person with Down syndrome
Spastic, spaz	Person with a disability, person with cerebral palsy
Institution	Mental health clinic

How to talk to people with disabilities

When you're talking with a person who has a disability, just be yourself. Make sure you:

- Establish and maintain eye contact
- Talk directly to the person - don't talk to their companion instead
- Never speak about the person as if they can't understand or respond
- Don't assume a person can't do things
- Don't talk about 'fixing' or 'making the person better'. They might feel fine!
- Ask someone first before offering help - they may not need it!
- Don't pat or talk to a guide dog or service animal - these animals are working so shouldn't be distracted
- Don't assume a person with a disability has other disabilities. Eg, someone who has low vision can still hear you, there is no need to shout.

(Source House with No Steps <http://www.hwms.com.au/Resource-centre/disability-language-guide>)