

What is disability?

Disability can result from accident, illness, congenital or genetic disorders. There are many different kinds of disability—physical, intellectual or mental health related. A disability may be visible or hidden, may be permanent or temporary and may have a minimal or substantial impact on a person's abilities. A disability may affect mobility, ability to learn, or ability to communicate easily.

Disability: What are the different types of impairment?

Physical disabilities

Conditions that result in physical disabilities include spinal cord injury, arthritis, cerebral palsy, acquired brain injury, multiple sclerosis and a number of other conditions of the muscular, nervous and respiratory systems. These conditions tend to result in some degree of restricted activity in mobility and manipulation, such as restricted arm and hand movements and communication.

Intellectual disabilities

The term 'intellectual disability' refers to a group of conditions caused by various genetic disorders and infections. These conditions result in a limitation or slowness in an individual's general ability to learn and difficulties in communicating and retaining information. As with all disability groups, there are many types of intellectual disability with varying degrees of severity.

Mental illness

Disabilities labelled as psychiatric or psychological may include schizophrenia, clinical depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, and anxiety disorders. Anxiety and depression are two of the most common psychological disabilities.

Sensory

Blindness and vision impairment

There are an estimated 300,000 Australians who are blind or have some kind of vision impairment. While some people have a total absence of vision, about 90 percent of people classified as legally blind have some useable vision. Access requirements of people with vision impairments will therefore vary widely.

Deafness or hearing impairment

There are an estimated 30,000 deaf people in Australia who have no useable hearing and whose first language is Auslan (Australian Sign Language). In addition, there are between one and three million Australians with varying degrees of hearing impairment who mainly use oral communication.

Learning disabilities

Learning disability is the result of neurological disorder which may cause the learner to receive and process some information inaccurately. The most common learning disability is dyslexia. Other learning disabilities are dysgraphia and aphasia. Students with a learning disability may have significant difficulties in perceiving and/or processing auditory, visual or spatial information.

Asperger syndrome and Autism

Asperger syndrome is an autistic spectrum disorder caused by a neurological dysfunction which particularly impacts on social functioning. As this is so intrinsic to the way that most teaching and learning takes place, students with autism or Asperger syndrome may find the experience of further education & training daunting despite having the intellectual capacity to study at this level.

Health conditions

A wide range of medical conditions may impact on students' learning and their ability to attend lectures and tutorials, complete assignments by due dates or be assessed in the usual ways. These conditions include epilepsy, asthma, diabetes, kidney disorders, cystic fibrosis, cancer, hepatitis, chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and HIV/AIDS. While some of these conditions are lifelong, others such as CFS, may last for periods ranging from a few months to several years.

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