

# Figuring Out the Disability Workforce

Everyone knows that the disability workforce is growing quickly to meet the demands of the new National Disability Insurance Scheme. But is it quick enough for the additional demand anticipated under the Scheme?

Is the trend towards more casual roles, as some people predict? Or is job quality in the sector improving, since providers now need to step up to attract good workers?

## Workforce Growth

Funding for disability services is roughly doubling over the five year-roll out of the NDIS. So it is often said that the disability workforce will need to double as well. However, we don't actually know how many 'disability workers' there are in Australia – ABS surveys don't go into sufficient detail for that. Just who is a disability worker can be tricky to pin down. Many allied health professionals, for example, work across several sectors. Support workers can also work for one or more disability providers, engaged directly by participants, or working for themselves in another industry.

From the NDS Workforce Census data collection we do know how fast the disability workforce is growing.

### On average:

- The support workforce is growing by **over 10%** per year
- This compares to the much more slowly growing Australian workforce, which was increasing by **1.8%** per year prior to COVID
- At this rate, the workforce would grow by roughly **70%**, over the five year NDIS rollout. What we don't know is how many new disability workers are working independently, or in new small businesses. So overall workforce growth could be much higher.

## Job Quality

The NDIS is giving people with disability more control and new opportunities. As it should, this means more choices in the timing, nature and location of supports, and providers.

This can lead to demands on workers to be more flexible and change their hours at short notice. Filling rosters has become a more complex process. An evaluation report about the NDIS found that pay and job security were the biggest concerns for support workers.

## Workforce Census

Workforce Census is a workforce benchmarking tool designed specifically by NDS for the disability sector. Workforce Census now has five years of data covering some 30,000 to 50,000 workers nationally each quarter.

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To limit the costs of travel, many providers are trying to employ people who live locally, have the right skills, and have the ability to build a good relationship with the client.

All of this can influence the quality of jobs on offer in the sector. Job quality is usually measured according to criteria such as:

- Pay rates
- Whether a job offers paid leave
- Average hours of work
- Training and development opportunities
- Health and safety risks
- Turnover rates

## We know that:

**Casual employment** - i.e jobs without paid leave – is high in disability compared to other industries. Around 42% of the support workforce employed through providers on Workforce Census are casuals, compared to 24% of the total Australian workforce.

**Demographics, of the disability workforce** - About 70% of disability support workers are female. Around 44% of disability workers are over 44 years old. This compared to 39% of the total Australian workforce.

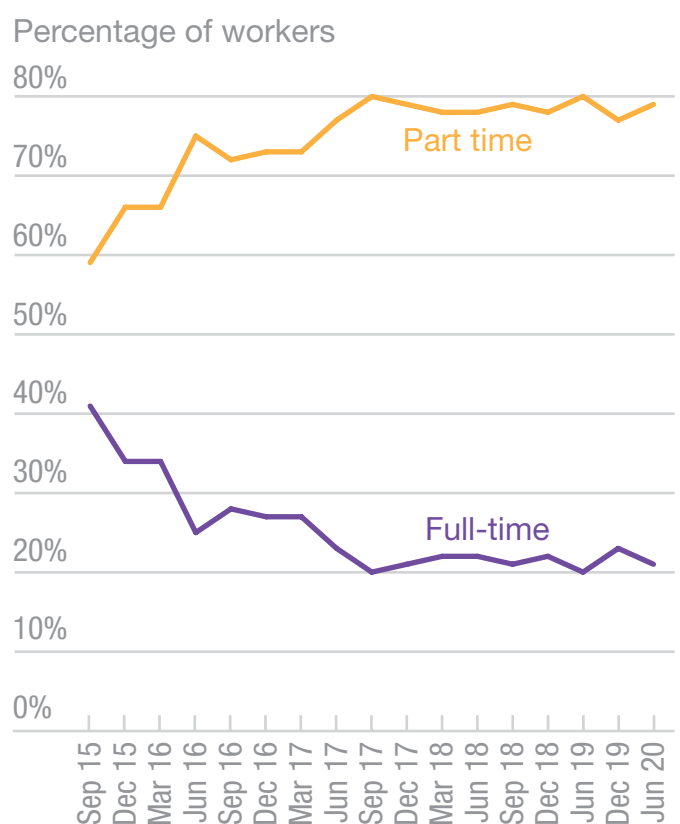
**Allied health workers are more likely to be permanently employed** (three quarters are). However, the number of those on temporary or fixed term contracts is growing among small providers.

**Most disability workers are paid award rates.** Although over 40% of providers are covered by enterprise agreements, these deal mainly with hours and work time issues, leaving pay rates to be set through the Social, Community and Home Care and Disability Services Award.

**About a quarter of the disability workforce change jobs every year.**

Part-time work is growing as the chart below shows. But NDS' analysis of data found that part-time jobs are sometimes more popular than other types. So this could be a trend welcomed by both workers and employers.

Overall, it is clear that the disability workforce is operating more flexibly under the NDIS to benefit people with disability. But there is a longer term question about the quality of jobs and the workforce, if workers' needs are not taken into account as well.



Data source: Workforce Census

### More information:

The information in this fact sheet is drawn from NDS' half-yearly Workforce Census data collection

**To find out more, contact:**  
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