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We carried out research to learn more about the enablers and barriers to social and community participation for NDIS participants.

We focused on people with intellectual disability, psychosocial disability and people on the autism spectrum.

These groups make up two-thirds of NDIS participants, of which many encounter barriers to social and community participation.

Social and community activities can increase a sense of belonging, connection and inclusion, as well as confidence and safety.

The findings from this research will inform our approach to improve community participation amongst participants.

This aligns with the NDIA Corporate Plan 2021-2025 .

Our research projects

The research was made up of two projects:

1. An umbrella evidence review to identify which interventions and supports improve social and community participation outcomes in the target groups. It included 57 systematic reviews of 522 relevant studies.
2. A mixed-methods study that explored participant experiences and the barriers and enablers to community participation. It involved interviews and focus groups with participants, families and carers, as well as focus groups and a survey of frontline staff.

You can read the research project reports below.

- Getting out into the world – full report (PDF 4.1MB)
- Plain language Getting out into the world – summary (PDF 1.4MB)
- Interventions to improve social, community and civic participation evidence review (PDF 1.3MB)
- Interventions to improve social, community and civic participation evidence review - Plain language summary (PDF 381KB)

What we found

How was community participation defined?

- Community participation was defined as:
    - where people interact with others.
    - who and how they interact with others and how that makes them feel.
    - the activities they do with others.

Why is social and community participation important?

- Participants in this research told us that community participation gave them:
    - a sense of belonging and connection.
    - a way to deepen relationships with friends and family.
    - larger social networks and reduced isolation.
    - greater confidence and the feeling that they are safe in the community.
    - a way to increase opportunities for further community participation, employment or study.

Enablers to social and community participation

- Foundational needs gave participants the energy for community activities. For example, stable housing, food security, adequate sleep and mental and physical health.
- Having support to find options, express choices and make decisions.
- Support workers matched in age, skills and interests and who have the skills to get the best outcomes for participants.
- Individualised supports can improve accessibility of activities.

Barriers to social and community participation

- Negative community attitudes meant participants didn’t feel comfortable or were unable to easily access broader community-based activities.
- Participants sometimes felt their disability and their support needs are not always well understood and there is a lack of clarity around funding supports.
- Some participants said they had trouble finding suitable and capable workers that match their needs and expectations.
- Low participant self-confidence and lack of individualised programs and opportunities to connect with peers who have the same interests.
- Lack of available and accessible transport.

Supports and opportunities to increase social and community participation

- A range of planning and service delivery approaches can enable participation, for example:
    - Person-centred planning to identify goals, interests and needs of an individual. This is often done in partnership with family, friends, or others from the individual’s circle of support. The focus is on meaningful participation, not just finding available services or resources.
    - Skilled individualised supports using strategies like active support and positive behaviour support. These help people to have genuine interactions in the community.
    - Support from someone who is trained to link people who are socially isolated to relevant activities and groups in the community.
- Capability-focused interventions help people to build skills so that they can participate socially or in the community.
    - This included supports to:

        - Build social and communication skills
        - Improve knowledge about friendships or romantic relationships.
        - Learn life skills for roles such as parenting or getting a job.
    - People with intellectual or psychosocial disability respond well to social skills training in both individual and group settings. People on the autism spectrum improve social skills better with individual skill building interventions.
- Activities that led to improved participation outcomes (making friends, spending time in the community and feeling a sense of belonging) included:
    - Art-based activities such as music, drama, and art.
    - Sports, physical activity and outdoor nature-based activities.

How we used this research

We used this research to create our Guide for understanding supports: social and community participation.

This guide provides you, your family or carers with information about supports based on best available research evidence.

You can find this guide and others on Guides for understanding supports .

Transcript for 'What community participation means'
Transcript for ' How you can participate socially and in the community'
Transcript for 'Supports that can help you connect in the community'
Transcript for 'Building skills and confidence to participate'
Transcript for 'Connecting young people to the community'
Transcript for 'Community participation as your life changes'