

Community overview



Communities are groups of people who have something in common, such as family relationship, friendship, location or interest. Communities span many different aspects of a person's life, such as cultural or religious activities, employment, education, sport and leisure. Community involvement can contribute to a person's wellbeing by providing a sense of identity and belonging, or opportunities to build positive relationships. Further, communities contribute to social cohesion by building people's capacity to work together and for each other, to address social problems and support those in need.

The census provides a wealth of information about communities in local areas. Articles in this chapter provide a national and local picture of some aspects of community involvement. Unpaid work, included in the 2006 Census for the first time, is an important aspect of community involvement. Apart from domestic work in the home, it encompasses voluntary work, child care and unpaid care for people with a disability. This overview also focuses on people who need assistance with core activities. Many people requiring assistance face barriers to community involvement and need support from others to participate. Much of the care received by this group is unpaid, provided by family members and others in the community.

Voluntary work

Volunteers help to meet needs in society and in turn volunteering can give people a sense of satisfaction and opportunities to interact with others. Over the last decade, a growing number of Australians have participated in voluntary work. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Voluntary Work Survey (2006) showed that 35% of people aged 18 years and over had volunteered in the previous year, a higher proportion than in 2000 (32%) and in 1995 (24%).¹

In 2006, half of Australian adults helped to build community by caring for children, or a person with a disability, or doing voluntary work.

Women lead the way in the growing ranks of volunteers

The 2006 Census provides a good picture of the characteristics of volunteers. More women had volunteered than men, regardless of age, living arrangements, labour force participation, hours in paid work per week, religious affiliation or country of birth. Part-time workers, especially those who worked under 20 hours a week, volunteered at higher rates than those working full-time or those who were not employed.

People living in rural areas of Australia were more likely to volunteer than those living in urban areas: around 28% of residents of Rural areas volunteered, compared with 18% of residents of Major Urban areas and 23% of residents of Other Urban areas (see Glossary for definition of geographic areas). For more information, see 'Volunteering across Australia', p. 103–106.

Overall, people born in Australia were more likely to volunteer than those born overseas (22% compared with 15%). However people who were born overseas and who spoke only English at home were almost as likely to volunteer (20%) as Australian-born people, and there were considerable differences between birthplace groups. For example, a high proportion of people born in North America (31%) and Melanesia and Micronesia (23%) had volunteered.

While there was also considerable variation within the major religious groups, Christians were generally more likely than people of the same age with no religious affiliation to have volunteered. Although people who were affiliated with a non-Christian religion were less likely to volunteer than Christians or people with no religion, people of a non-Christian religion who spoke only English at home were more likely to volunteer (26%) than Christians (23%) and people with no religion (18%) who also spoke only English at home.

Volunteering across the life cycle

...Young people

Volunteering is related broadly to age and more specifically to the stage people are at in the life cycle. The proportion of young people who volunteered was relatively low compared with other age groups. However, the pattern of volunteering in the younger age groups

reflects a link with participation in education. Over half of young people were studying (56% of 15–24 year olds), and students in this age group had higher participation in voluntary work than others (20% of students volunteered compared with 12% of people who were not studying). Consistent with this, dependent students were more likely to volunteer than people of similar ages but at different stages of the life cycle (see table page 92).

Along with dependent students, members of *young group households* and *young lone persons* had higher levels of participation in voluntary work (19% and 18% respectively) than *young non-dependent children* still living with parents and those in *young couple families without children* (12% and 14% respectively). Young people in lone and group households may have fewer family responsibilities and more free time than other young people.

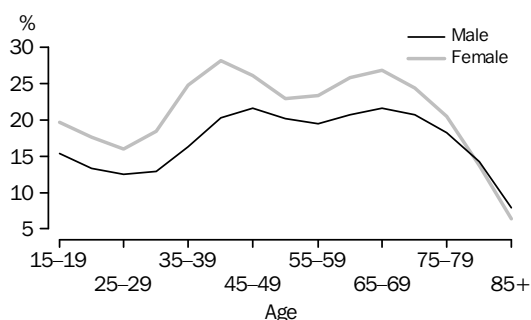
Characteristics of people aged 15 years and over who volunteered

	Male %	Female %	Persons %	Volunteers '000	Total population(a) '000
Country of birth					
Australia	19.1	24.0	21.6	2 183.0	10 583.6
Overseas	13.6	17.3	15.5	612.9	4 178.3
Religion					
No religion	15.3	20.4	17.6	478.5	2 793.2
Religious affiliation	18.3	22.6	20.5	2 219.0	11 380.4
Christian religion	18.7	23.0	21.0	2 070.4	10 393.6
Non-Christian religion	14.7	17.2	15.9	148.7	986.8
Place of usual residence					
Major Urban	15.4	19.6	17.6	7 959.5	10 675.4
Other Urban	19.9	25.2	22.7	2 354.5	3 370.3
Rural area	24.6	30.8	27.6	1 208.0	1 834.2
Labour force status					
Worked part-time (under 20 hours)	21.9	29.3	27.0	326.1	1 224.3
Worked part-time (20 to 34 hours)	18.5	24.5	22.6	326.1	1 460.9
Worked full-time (35 hours or more)	17.4	19.3	18.1	1 040.1	5 827.4
Total employed(b)	17.7	22.7	20.0	1 786.9	9 104.2
Not employed	16.9	21.3	19.5	1 049.3	5 774.9
Total	17.4	22.0	19.8	2 851.0	15 918.1

(a) Total population includes people who did not state voluntary work.

(b) Includes people who were employed but away from work.

Age profile of volunteers



...Families with children

Many adults with young children contributed to society through voluntary work, seen in the peak levels of volunteering among people in their 30s and 40s. Adults in *couple families with school-aged children* were the most likely to volunteer: 30% of people in such families had volunteered. In comparison, people in *couple families with young children* had a

lower level of participation (18%). Opportunities for parents to assist with school, sport and other organised activities tend to diminish as children move into their late teens. Participation in voluntary work among adults in *couple families with young adult children* (21%) was lower than people in *couple families with school-aged children* (30%). Lone parents were less likely than their counterparts in couple families to volunteer, possibly reflecting time and resource constraints of sole parenting.

...Retirement years

Participation in voluntary work was slightly lower among people aged 45–59, but reached a second peak in the 60s age group. In this age group people generally move from work to retirement, and by their late 60s most people are no longer in the labour force. Many people in this group have time and skills to offer to voluntary organisations, and volunteering in turn offers them an alternative vocation and the opportunity to contribute to society

People aged 15 and over in selected life-cycle groups who volunteered

	Male	Female	Persons	Volunteers	Total(a)
	%	%	%	'000	'000
Dependent student(b)	17.8	22.6	20.3	160.7	888.5
Young non-dependent child(b)(c)	10.2	14.5	11.9	107.9	960.9
Young group household	15.6	22.0	18.5	62.7	349.1
Young lone person	15.3	20.8	17.7	50.0	291.2
Young couple family without children	12.6	15.5	14.0	94.0	677.6
Couple family with young children	15.3	19.8	17.6	250.5	1 457.8
One parent family with young children	10.4	13.0	12.7	16.3	135.1
Couple family with school-aged children	25.3	33.9	29.7	491.6	1 705.1
One parent family with school-aged children	18.8	25.6	24.4	73.6	315.8
Couple family with young adult children	19.2	22.1	20.7	230.5	1 144.2
One parent family with young adult children	15.4	19.8	18.7	41.9	232.7
Middle-aged couple family	21.0	24.0	22.5	351.1	1 605.9
Older couple family without children	21.4	24.2	22.8	192.6	955.4
Older lone person	15.8	22.8	20.7	113.0	649.1
Total(d)	17.4	22.0	19.8	2 851.0	15 918.1

(a) Total population includes people who did not state voluntary work.

(b) Other life-cycle tables throughout this report do not separately identify dependent students and young non-dependent children, rather they are included in the family categories to which they belong.

(c) Includes non-dependent grandchildren.

(d) Includes people not included in selected life-cycle groups. See Glossary for more information on life-cycle groups.

outside of paid employment. Participation in voluntary work declined among those aged 70 and older. In older age, people may experience a number of significant events that can lead to social isolation, including retirement, death of a partner, living alone and failing health. Fewer older men living as *older lone persons* had volunteered (16%) than men living in an *older couple family without children* (21%), as men living alone are concentrated in the oldest ages, and are more likely to be limited by health problems.

Unpaid child care

The future of Australia will be significantly shaped by today's children. Quality care and support for children provided by parents, families and the broader community is an investment in the continuation and future prosperity of society. The 2006 Census counted just under 4 million children aged under 15 years. Around 4.4 million adults had

cared for a child in the previous two weeks: 3.2 million parents cared for their own children, including 0.2 million who cared for their own and another child, and 1.1 million people supported families by caring for children who were not their own.

Over the past few decades, care arrangements for Australian children have changed. More women are in paid employment than in the past and parents are increasingly using formal child care arrangements to allow them to undertake paid work while raising a family. As well, many children are cared for by grandparents, siblings, relatives, friends and neighbours (known as informal child care). According to the 2005 ABS Child Care Survey, over half of all children under 13 years of age were only cared for by their parents, one third received informal child care (some in combination with formal child care) and one fifth received formal care (some in combination with informal child care).³

Measures of unpaid work in the 2006 Census

Voluntary work

A volunteer is a person aged 15 years and over who did voluntary work through an organisation or group in the 12 months prior to Census Night 2006. Information on volunteers was also collected in the 2006 Voluntary Work Survey (VWS), conducted as part of the General Social Survey. The number of volunteers measured in the census (2.9 million) is considerably lower than in the VWS (5.2 million).¹ Different collection methods explain these different results. The census is self reported, and in some cases one household member reports for others in the household, while the VWS is conducted by personal interviewers who provide prompts. Even so, census data are valuable as they provide insights into volunteering patterns in different local communities and the characteristics of volunteers. When interpreting results from the census, it must be recognised that people of different backgrounds may have different understandings of what constitutes voluntary work, and the activities that might be considered as voluntary work.

Unpaid child care

The 2006 Census identified people aged 15 years and over who spent time in the previous fortnight caring for their own child, and people who cared for grandchildren, or children of relatives, friends or neighbours without being paid. Only care for children under 15 was included. Interpretation of what caring for a child means can vary between individuals. The census did not collect information about the time a person spent caring for a child, or how time with children is spent.

Unpaid care for a person with a disability

In the 2006 Census, 1.6 million people aged 15 years and over indicated that they had provided unpaid care in the 2 weeks before the census. Unpaid care was defined as help or assistance with daily activities to a person because of a disability, a long term illness or problems related to old age. This count of people who provided care was lower than the total population of Carers identified by the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) in 2003 (2.6 million).² The lower count in the census can be explained by differences between the census and SDAC, in both definitions and collection methods. In the census it is not possible to link people who provided unpaid care with the people who they were assisting.

Most parents care for children, though mothers more likely to live with and care for children

Caring for children is most common for people in their late 30s, and many people aged 25–54 cared for their own children. There are clear age and gender differences in parental child care. Of people aged 15–44, women were more likely than men to care for their own child (see graph next page). The main factor explaining this is that women are much more likely than men to live with their natural children. In 2003 only 18% of all non-resident parents were women.⁴ In addition, women tend to partner and have children at an earlier age than men.^{5,6,7} The 2006 Census shows that the majority of parents who lived with children under 15 had provided child care. Although a higher proportion of women than men in such families provided child care (87% compared with 76%), men working full-time were almost as likely as women working full-time to care for their own child.

In the 2006 Census there were around 201,000 people who cared for their own child but did not live with their natural child. Just under 72% of this group were non-resident fathers. Over 44% of non-resident fathers who had cared for their own child lived in a non-family household, mainly alone. One third of these non-resident fathers lived in a family without their natural child, such as a step family or couple without children. The census does not identify all non-resident parents, namely non-resident parents who did not have contact with their child in the previous two weeks, or those who lived with their natural child and had another natural child living elsewhere.

The Family Characteristics and Transitions Survey (2006–07) estimated that there were around 470,000 non-resident parents in Australia, the great majority of whom were non-resident fathers (82%).⁴

Living arrangements of parents who cared for their own children

	Male		Female	
	'000	%	'000	%
Lived with their natural child				
Partner in couple family	1 169.8	95.9	1 393.2	81.1
Lone parent	50.6	4.1	323.9	18.9
<i>Total</i>	1 220.5	100.0	1 717.1	100.0
Did not live with their natural child				
Partner in couple family or lone parent(a)	47.8	33.0	28.0	49.7
Other person in family household(b)	30.4	20.9	15.2	26.9
Non-family household	64.1	44.2	11.5	20.4
Other living arrangement	2.7	1.9	1.7	3.0
<i>Total</i>	144.9	100.0	56.4	100.0
All parents who cared for their children				
Total lived with their natural child	1 220.5	85.7	1 717.1	94.3
Total did not live with their natural child	144.9	10.2	56.4	3.1
Total(c)	1 423.7	100.0	1 820.3	100.0

(a) Includes step parents, and partners in a couple family without children or with unrelated children. Includes lone parents with step children or unrelated children only.

(b) Includes children aged 15 years and over, other relatives and unrelated individuals in a family household.

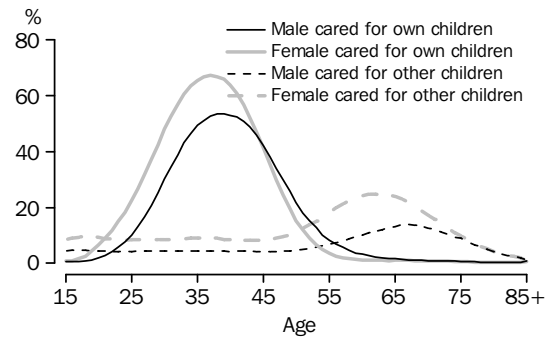
(c) Total includes visitors, and step parents where one or more children in the family were temporarily absent.

Many older women play role in raising others' children

In 2006, 1.3 million people provided unpaid care for another child, who was not their own. Two thirds of the people who provided informal child care were women. Women of all ages were more likely than men to care for another child. Although fewer women than men of working age were in full-time employment, women were more likely to care for another child regardless of their working arrangements.

More than half the people who cared for another child were aged 50 and over, and it is likely that many of these people cared for grandchildren. The ABS Child Care Survey (2005) shows that 60% of children receiving informal child care were being looked after by grandparents.³ Gender differences were most pronounced in the 50–74 age group, with women being twice as likely as men to have cared for another child (19% compared with 9%). People of this age living in a one parent family with children under 15 were more likely than people with other living arrangements to care for another child. Around 45% of this group were grandmothers living with their child and grandchild, and 38% were lone mothers.

Unpaid child care(a)



(a) People who cared for their own and other children are included in both 'cared for own children' and 'cared for other children'.

People aged 15–49 living in a one parent or couple family with children under 15 were more likely to provide informal child care than people with other living arrangements. Around 76% of this group were parents who typically might have cared for children of relatives or friends, and 24% were older children (aged 15 and over) or other relatives who may have cared for young children in their family. People aged 15–49 living in a couple family without children were almost as likely to have cared for another child as people living in a couple family with children under 15.

People who cared for other people's children

	15–49 years	50–74 years	Total(a)
	%	%	%
Men	4.4	9.2	5.9
Women	8.8	19.0	11.6
Couple family with no children	7.1	18.5	13.2
Couple family with children under 15	7.3	13.2	7.7
Couple family with children 15 and over	4.4	10.2	6.6
One parent family with children under 15	10.2	27.2	11.6
One parent family with children 15 and over	4.9	9.7	6.2
Other family	5.2	7.3	5.4
Lone or group household	5.8	9.6	6.7
Total	6.6	14.2	8.8
Total ('000)	596.1	635.5	1 276.1

(a) Total includes people aged 75 years and over.

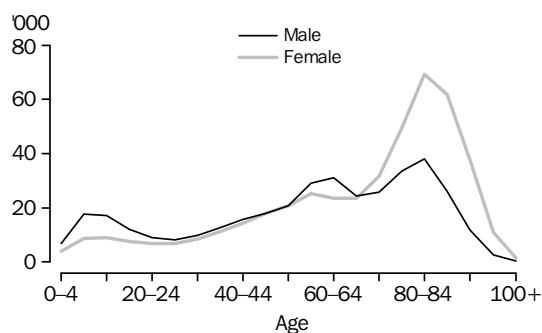
Providing informal child care was equally common in most states and territories (6–7% of men and 11–13% of women). An exception was the Northern Territory: 9% of men and 16% of women who lived in the Northern Territory had cared for another child. In Rural areas of the Northern Territory 13% of men and 23% of women had provided informal child care. This possibly reflects the unavailability of commercial child care services, or for child care to be undertaken by extended family members in Indigenous communities in these areas.

People with a need for assistance

Participation in community and cultural life is recognised as a basic human need, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a fundamental human right.⁸ The census can inform us about the living conditions, employment and education of people with a need for assistance. This information can be used to highlight some of the areas in which people with a need for assistance face barriers to participating in society. They may be limited by their impairment, or by external factors such as reliance on a carer, the attitudes of others, the physical environment or the inclusiveness of social institutions.

The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) showed that in 2003 there were 4.0 million people with a disability (see Glossary), and 1.2 million of those people had a severe or profound limitation.² The rate of profound or severe core activity limitation was stable between 1998 and 2003, although the number of people with a severe or profound core activity limitation increased in this period. Numbers are projected to increase in the

Number of people with a core activity need for assistance



future, due to population growth and ageing, which will lead to increasing numbers and proportions of older people in the population; and increasing longevity, including longevity for people with a disability.⁹

At the time of the 2006 Census, 4.4% of Australians needed daily assistance with core activities such as self-care, moving around or communicating, because of a long term health condition, a disability or old age (refer to box below for more information). There were around 566,000 private households that included a person who required such assistance. The likelihood of having a need for assistance increases with age: less than 1 in 10 people aged under 65 needed assistance; 2 in 10 people aged 65 and over; and 5 in 10 people aged 85 and over had such a need.

Need for assistance

The census definition of a person with a 'core activity need for assistance' is a person needing help or assistance in one or more of the three core activities of self-care, mobility and communication because of a disability or a long term health condition (lasting six months or more), or old age.

The census measure of 'core activity need for assistance' counted only a portion of all Australians with a disability. The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC)² collected by the ABS is considered to comprehensively measure disability populations. The census concept of 'core activity need for assistance' relates to the 'severe or profound core activity limitation' concept used in SDAC.

The number of people with a core activity need for assistance identified in the 2006 Census (821,600) is smaller than the number of people with a severe or profound disability counted in the 2003 SDAC (1,244,500), owing to the briefer set of questions used on the census form, the different collection methodology and the 6.4% non-response to the census questions on need for assistance.

Graphs and tables in this chapter present data from the 2006 Census measure of 'core activity need for assistance'.

Need for assistance across the life cycle

...Children

The 2006 Census shows that under 2% (64,000) of all children under 15 had a need for assistance. Two in every three children with a need for assistance were boys. Supporting this, SDAC (2003) showed that boys were more likely than girls to report any type of disability and were more likely to have a severe or profound limitation, due mainly to boys having greater likelihood of genetic disorder.¹⁰ Almost all children reporting a need for assistance in the 2006 Census lived in a family in a private home (99%). Of all children living in a family, children requiring assistance were less likely to live in a couple family than other children (70% compared with 81%) and more likely to live in a one parent family (30% compared with 19%).

A slightly higher proportion of school-aged children (5–14 years) had a need for assistance than young children (0–4 years). This is chiefly explained by the diagnosis of intellectual disability. Some health conditions are not diagnosed in the first few years of life but are increasingly being diagnosed in school aged children through early intervention programs at schools and health clinics.

The proportion of young people aged 15–24 with a need for assistance was lower than the proportion of school-aged children. Many factors contribute to this, including successful interventions in childhood that improve the

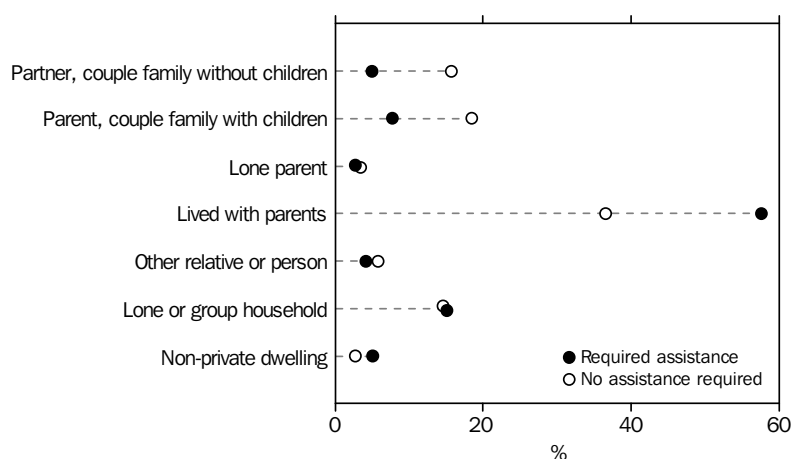
person's level of functioning; and the effect of data collection—young people may respond themselves, while parents report on behalf of children aged under 15.¹⁰

...Young adults and middle-aged people

Just over 300,000 people aged 15–64 had a need for assistance, accounting for 38% of all people who required assistance according to the 2006 Census. Up to the age of 65 years men were more likely to report a need for assistance than women. Consequently there were around 44,000 more men than women who required assistance aged under 65. One contributing factor is the higher rates of injury among young men compared with women.¹¹

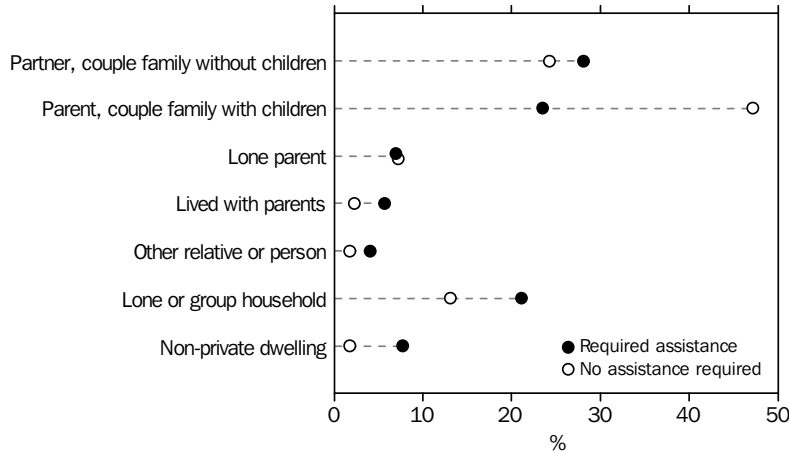
Most adults (15–64) who required assistance (93%) lived in a private home. However, adults who required assistance were more likely to live in group or lone households than adults who did not require assistance, particularly those aged 35–64 years. Young adults (15–34 years) who required assistance were half as likely as others in the same age group to live in a couple family, while they were much more likely to live with their parents. People aged 35–64 who required assistance were slightly more likely than those who did not require assistance to live in a couple family without children, though half as likely to live in a couple family with children. Some people with a need for assistance in this age group may have developed a disability later in life, after partnering or raising a family.

Living arrangements of young adults with and without a need for assistance(a)



(a) Proportion of people aged 15–34 years in these living arrangements.

Living arrangements of middle-aged people with and without a need for assistance(a)



(a) Proportion of people aged 35–64 years in these living arrangements.

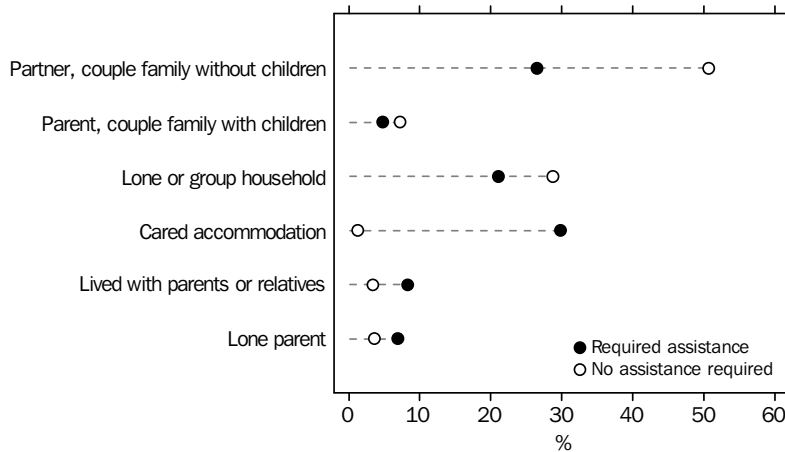
A small proportion of adults who required assistance were accommodated in non-private dwellings (5% of 15–34 year olds and 8% of 35–64 year olds), including nursing homes and hostels for people with a disability.

...Older people

In the 2006 Census, a sizeable group of people who needed assistance were aged 65 and over (450,000), accounting for 55% of all those requiring assistance. A large proportion of these were women: for every man aged 65 and over with a need for assistance there were almost two women of the same age with such a need. A contributing factor is that older women are more likely than men to survive to ages and experience health problems related to old age.

Just over two thirds of older people with a need for assistance lived in a private home, and a third lived in a non-private dwelling—mainly in cared accommodation (see Glossary). A quarter of older people with a need for assistance lived with their partner in a family without children, although they were half as likely as other people of this age group to live in this type of family. One fifth lived alone, a group with a special need for support services. Another fifth lived in a family with children or relatives, and possibly received support from them. This group included older people living with their adult children in a couple or one parent family, and those who lived with parents or relatives (see graph below).

Living arrangements of older people with and without a need for assistance(a)



(a) Proportion of people aged 65 years and over in these living arrangements.

Employment and education

Employment and education are linked to a person's wellbeing, through income earned and involvement in society. The overwhelming majority of people with a need for assistance were not in the labour force, probably reflecting the severe or profound nature of their disability. Around 81% of people who required assistance and were of working age (15–64 years) were not in the labour force, while 16% were employed and 3% were unemployed.

People who required assistance tended to have lower educational attainment than others. Of those 20–64 years, 26% of people who required assistance had completed secondary school and 29% had obtained a non-school qualification. In comparison just over half of people with no need for assistance had completed secondary school, and a similar proportion had a non-school qualification.

The gap in formal educational attainment between people with a need for assistance and others was smaller in the older working age group (55–64 years) than younger age groups. This is partly explained by the lower educational attainment of this age group as a whole, who experienced different opportunities to undertake education in their

lives compared with younger age groups. It also suggests that some people in this age group may have developed a disability later in life, after attaining an education. In contrast, a person with an early-onset disability may have restricted educational opportunities: while similar proportions of young people of secondary school age (15–19 years) with and without a need for assistance were attending an educational institution, there was a larger gap in the 20–24 age group.

Fewer people needing assistance accessed internet at home

Among other things, internet access at home allows people to learn about and access many government and business services, news and current affairs, and communicate with others.

Having access to the internet may be particularly important for people with a disability, many of whom leave home less often than they prefer.² However, people with a need for assistance who lived in private households were considerably less likely than others to have an internet connection at home regardless of their age: 55% lived in a household with an internet connection and 34% lived in a household with broadband connection, compared with 76% and 51% of people with no need for assistance.

Socioeconomic characteristics of people with and without a need for assistance(a)

	Required assistance		Did not require assistance	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	%	%	%	%
Labour force status(a)				
Employed	16.9	15.7	79.3	66.4
Unemployed	2.9	2.1	4.4	3.7
Not in the labour force	80.3	82.1	16.3	29.9
Enrolled in education				
15–19 years	72.7	74.8	73.9	77.6
20–24 years	20.6	27.3	33.3	36.5
Completed Year 12(b)	24.3	27.9	52.2	54.6
Has a non-school qualification(b)	31.8	26.5	58.4	50.3
Internet access(c)				
Internet access at home	55.1	55.8	75.5	75.7
Broadband connection at home	34.3	34.1	51.9	50.0
(a) People aged 15–64 years.				
(b) People aged 20–64 years.				
(c) People in occupied private dwellings only.				

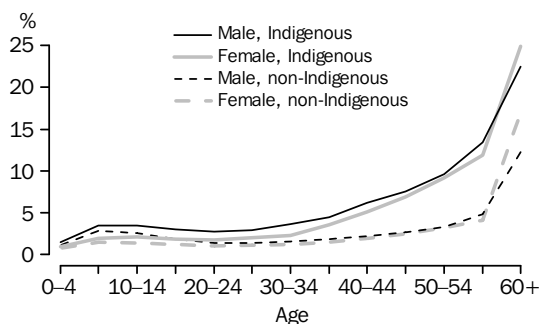
Need for assistance higher in Indigenous population

Indigenous Australians suffer more ill-health than other Australians. Many reports have shown that the Indigenous population is disadvantaged across many socioeconomic indicators that are associated with health, and are more likely to be exposed to a range of health risk factors, both environmental and behavioural. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a lower life expectancy than other Australians, and higher rates of chronic diseases, such as kidney disease, diabetes and heart disease.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (2002) showed that after adjusting for differences in the age structure of the two populations, the rate of profound/severe core activity limitation among Indigenous peoples aged 18 years and over in non-remote areas was 2.1 times the corresponding rate for non-Indigenous people.¹²

In the 2006 Census, 4.6% of the Indigenous population stated a need for assistance, slightly higher than the non-Indigenous population (4.4%). However, the Indigenous population is considerably younger than the non-Indigenous population. When this is taken into account the proportion of Indigenous peoples requiring assistance was twice as high as for non-Indigenous people, in line with earlier survey results. The age and gender pattern of need for assistance in the Indigenous population was similar to the pattern for the non-Indigenous population. For example, young Indigenous men are more likely than young Indigenous women to have a need for assistance, but this pattern reverses in the population aged 60 and over.

Indigenous status of men and women with a need for assistance



Southern and Eastern Europeans more likely to require assistance

There was considerable variation in the proportion of people who required assistance between birthplace groups. A higher proportion of people born in Southern and Eastern Europe (including Italy, Greece, Croatia and Poland) had a need for assistance compared with the Australian-born population. The age structure of this birthplace group was much older (median age of 59 years) than the Australian-born population (median age of 32 years), although the level of need for assistance in this group was higher even after removing the effect of age.

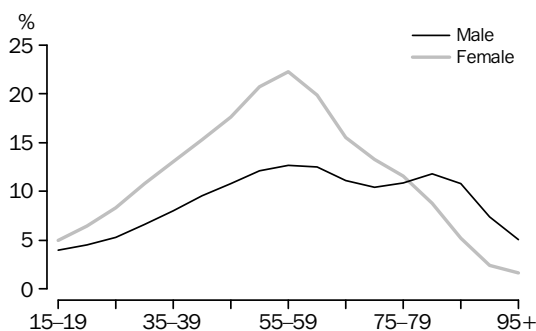
Unpaid care to a person with a disability

Carers play an essential role in the community. The people who provide assistance to family or friends with a disability ensure that these people receive needed physical care, emotional support and companionship. Carers can also help people with a need for assistance to maintain their connection to their community. According to the 2003 SDAC, 2.6 million Australians provided help to someone because of disability, long term health problems or old age.² Family members and friends are the most important source of support for Australians with a disability. Around 85% of people with a disability who needed assistance living in households received help from family members or friends and 57% received formal care.²

Two thirds of all carers were women, though older carers were mainly men

The 2006 Census shows that 11% of the Australian population had provided unpaid care to family members or others with a disability in the fortnight prior to the census. Women who had provided care outnumbered men—62% of all carers were women. Women of any birthplace, living arrangement or labour force status were more likely than similar men to provide unpaid care. Taking on a caring role can have a negative impact on a person. Carers may have more limited opportunities to do paid work, study or other activities, sometimes resulting in financial hardship and poor health.^{2, 15} For more information see 'Caring across the life cycle', p. 107–112.

People who provided unpaid care to a person with a disability



The proportion of people who provided unpaid care for a person with a disability increased steadily over the life course until peaking in the 50s age group: 21% of women and 12% of men aged 50–59 had provided unpaid care. Among women, the proportion providing care steadily decreased after 60 years of age. In contrast, the proportion of men who provided care gradually decreased after 65 years. Consequently, in the older age groups a higher proportion of men provided care than women. This can be explained by partner care—older men were substantially more likely than women to live with a partner (69% of men aged 75 and over compared with 33% of women), while many women outlive their partners and live alone.

There was little difference between people born in Australia and people born overseas. Around 11% of the Australian-born and 10% of the overseas-born population had provided care to a person with a disability. The proportion was higher for certain birthplace groups. For example, 16% of women and 10% of men born in North Africa and the Middle East, and 15% of women and 11% of men born in Southern and Eastern Europe had provided care. These differences may be explained by different cultural norms of care in birthplace groups, and in the case of the Southern and Eastern European-born community, an older age profile and so higher level of need for assistance.

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2007, *Voluntary Work, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 4441.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 2 ABS 2003, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia, 2003*, cat. no. 4430.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 3 ABS 2006, *Child Care, Australia, 2005*, cat. no. 4402.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 4 ABS 2008, *Family Characteristics and Transitions, Australia, 2006–07*, cat. no. 4442.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 5 ABS 2007, *Marriages, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 3306.0.55.001, ABS, Canberra.
- 6 De Vaus, D., Qu, L. and Weston, R. 2003, 'Changing Patterns of Partnering' in *Family Matters*, No.64, Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Melbourne.
- 7 ABS 2007, *Births, Australia, 2006*, cat. no. 3301.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 8 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, viewed 7 March 2008
<<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>.
- 9 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2007, *Australia's welfare 2007*, AIHW cat. no. AUS 93, AIHW, Canberra.
- 10 AIHW 2004, *Children with disabilities in Australia*. AIHW cat. no. DIS 38, AIHW, Canberra.
- 11 AIHW 2008, *Injury among young Australians*, AIHW Bulletin 60, AIHW, Canberra.
- 12 ABS and AIHW 2005, *The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, ABS cat. no. 4704.0, ABS, Canberra. AIHW cat. no. IHW 14, AIHW, Canberra.
- 13 Edwards, B., Higgins, D.J., Gray, M., Zmijewski, N. and Kingston, M. 2008, *The nature and impact of caring for family members with a disability in Australia*, Research Report No.16, AIFS, Melbourne.