

Disability: Polio And The Late Effects of Polio

- **Polio can cause disability and/or the Late Effects of Polio can cause disability as polio survivors age**
- **The use of aids can help people better manage their disability**
- **There is a wide range of services and support available**

What Is Disability?

A disability is any ongoing condition that affects everyday activities. The [World Health Organization](#) talks about three aspects of the resulting disability; impairment, activity limitation and participation restriction:

1. Impairment is a problem with body function or structure
2. Activity limitation is difficulty completing a task or action
3. Participation restriction is difficulty being involved in life situations or events

The Disability Services Act (1993) defines 'disability' as a condition:

- which is related to a physical, intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, or sensory impairment (or a combination of those impairments)
- which is permanent or likely to be permanent
- which is either present all the time (chronic) or comes and goes (episodic)
- which makes it difficult for the person to move freely, interact, communicate or learn without supports or services

Is Polio And/Or The Late Effects of Polio Considered A Disability?

[Poliomyelitis \(polio\)](#) is a virus that invades the nervous system. One in 200 infections leads to permanent paralysis. Most people make some recovery, but some may have ongoing disability.

The [Late Effects of Polio](#) include a range of symptoms that occur many years after the initial polio infection. Symptoms include [fatigue](#), [muscle and/or joint pain](#) and muscle weakness.

The disability resulting from polio and/or the Late Effects of Polio can include:

- becoming a permanent wheelchair user
- shortened limbs requiring bracing or special shoes
- a slight limp due to weakened muscles
- experiencing chronic fatigue
- and many more – every polio survivor is different

Disability Is Not Inability

People living with a disability may face stigma. Stigma can include shame or negative attitudes. Stigma may result in a person being excluded or discriminated against, for example:

- feeling isolated from your community
- not accessing support services for fear that someone might find out about your disability
- feeling of shame or humiliation about your disability

This information is taken from [Thinking about stigma, disability and CALD communities](#)

Everyone in the community needs to work together to make things better for people with disability. The responsibility for changing attitudes and responses to disability belongs to everyone. Read more: [National Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#).

It is important to access the services you require to reduce your disability. There are disability-specific organisations which can provide you with support. Getting appropriate support can improve your abilities.

Managing Disability

Using [aids and equipment](#) and accessing services can help people overcome disability. Recommendations to keep polio survivors independent and able to participate in daily life may include:

- leg braces to support weak muscles
- use of walking sticks and crutches to relieve weight on weak limbs and to prevent falls
- customised shoes to address unequal leg lengths (which can help with back pain and energy levels)
- use of wheelchairs or motorised scooters for long-distance
- for some people, losing weight to reduce strain on joints and muscles
- exercises for muscle weakness (see a [physiotherapist or exercise physiologist](#))
- management of pain through lifestyle changes, doing less, pacing, stretching, and use of assistive devices
- use of a respirator (breathing machine) at night to treat underventilation

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of Polio Australia, and any products, services or treatments described are not necessarily endorsed or recommended by Polio Australia.

What Are Disability Support Services?

There is a wide range of services and support available to people living with a disability. They include:

- Advocacy and legal services
- [Carer Payment](#) and [Carer Allowance](#)
- Concessions for: medication; transport; rent; utilities; etc.
- Condition-specific organisations and support groups
- [Disability Support Pension](#)
- Education and training
- Funding for [aids and equipment](#)
- Funding for [home modifications](#)
- [Health services](#) and [concessions](#)
- Help to [find or keep employment](#)
- Home help
- Personal care
- Respite care
- Social activities
- [Support for Carers](#)

Where Can I Find Out More?

- **If you are under 65 years of age:**
[National Disability Insurance Scheme \(NDIS\)](#)
Ph: [1800 800 110](#)
- **If you are over 65 years of age:**
[My Aged Care](#)
Ph: [1800 200 422](#)
- [Australian Department of Social Services](#) website