

August 2018

OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT IN DISABILITY SERVICES: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Outcomes refer to the impact or the effect that a service or support has on users (Miller, Cooper, Cook, & Petch, 2008). Measuring outcomes of disability services is important because it helps us assess whether the supports we provide actually make a difference to people and help them achieve what matters to them. It provides service providers with feedback and evidence about what works (or does not work), which can then be used to improve services, or develop new ones, based on a good understanding of that evidence. From an economic angle, measuring outcomes allows us to determine if funding, whether government or philanthropic or other, is being well used and delivering results (i.e., accountability, viability).

Over the last number of years there has been increased focus on measuring outcomes, driven by disability policy that places a person's will and preference at the forefront of service planning, and puts an onus on providers to monitor personal outcomes (e.g., National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS], National Disability Agreement, National Standards for Disability Services). The Productivity Commission Inquiry Report (2011) highlighted the importance of evidence and access to outcomes data, which is reflected in the passages below:

“An effective evidence base under the NDIS will be critical to ensure the financial sustainability of the scheme, the provision of cost-effective services and interventions (that which yields the best outcomes for scheme participants at low cost), improved outcomes for scheme participants, and good performance from service providers” (p. 563)

“Good quality data and evidence will be crucial in managing the scheme's costs, learning about the efficacy of alternative services and generating good outcomes for people with disabilities” (p. 109)

Since the publication of this report, the National Disability Insurance Agency [the Agency] has reiterated the importance of data, research and outcomes and has developed an outcomes framework to measure goal attainment for participants and the overall performance of the Scheme. The eight outcome domains that the Agency is interested in are: daily living, home, health and wellbeing, lifelong learning, work, social and community participation, relationships, choice and control (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2015). The outcomes framework relates directly to the 15 support categories and all supports must contribute to participant goals that are outlined in plans. It is evident that the Agency is interested in good outcomes for participants, and also ensuring that the Scheme is financially viable.

If outcomes are important, then services need a way to measure these. The academic and grey literature contains a plethora of surveys/ tools that purport to measure outcomes. In 2011, Scope commissioned a review (see Quilliam & Wilson, 2011) of some of the most frequently used outcomes measures in disability and, in 2012, National Disability Services published a report about outcomes measurement to upskill service providers about options for practice (National Disability Services, 2012). The Scope-commissioned review compared measures against a number of criteria that were identified as important for selecting or developing an outcomes measurement tool for use in disability services. Measures that were subject to this review included:

- The Australian Therapy Outcome Measures (Perry et al., 2004)
- The Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (Law et al., 1991)
- The Personal Wellbeing Index (Cummins, 1997)
- The Personal Outcome Measures (The Council on Quality and Leadership in Supports for People with Disabilities, 2005)
- The Functioning and Health Related Outcomes Model (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005)
- Goal Attainment Scaling (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968)

This review concluded that capturing outcomes is a complex process and that, while each measure had strengths and limitations, they did not align sufficiently with Scope's conceptualisation of outcomes and outcomes measurement (refer to Scope's Outcomes Framework: Wilson, 2006, Hagiliassis & Koritsas, 2015). For example, amongst the key requirements of a good standard outcomes measurement tool is that it allows for self-reporting by people with disability as far as possible. A further description of these criteria and a summary of some of the limitations of existing measures is published elsewhere (Koritsas & Hagiliassis, 2018; Quilliam & Wilson, 2011).

If services are to engage with outcomes measurement, tools and their associated processes need to be readily integrated into service delivery. They need to be easy and practical to administer, affordable, require minimal training, low effort and time for administration, and scoring, analysis and interpretation must be minimal. Importantly, they must allow for a broadening of self-report by people with a range of abilities so that a person's own perspective of his or her life is prioritised. Acknowledging there will remain a proportion of people with disability who require others to report on their behalf, tools need to clearly identify who is the source of information so that we better understand whose perspectives are indeed being captured.

Sample pre and post service changed dashboard



To this end, Scope has developed and validated two outcomes measures specifically for disability service providers that address many of the limitations evident in some of the existing tools: The Outcomes and Impact Scale - Revised (Wilson, Hagiliassis, Koritsas, & Caldwell, 2014; Koritsas, Hagiliassis, & Cuzzillo, 2017) and The Measuring Outcomes in Services and Supports Tool - Short Form (Hagiliassis, Nicola-Richmond, Wilson, & Mackay, 2014). Both surveys have been designed to elicit information directly from people with disability thereby affirming their agency and contribution as citizens, and focus on whole-of-life service outcomes, as well as addressing the criteria identified for good outcomes measures.

It is evident that having processes and tools to measure outcomes of service provision is important. It is also clear that outcomes measurement is complex and raises a number of challenges in practice. Acknowledging the challenges, the measures developed provide a person-directed and service-feasible way to make outcomes measurement a reality, especially as we transition to an open and competitive marketplace in which service providers will need to demonstrate outcomes for service users and funders.



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