

The Daily

Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017

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This release is available in [audio](#). The video "[Highlights from the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017, American Sign Language version](#)" is also available.

Canadians with disabilities: A demographic, employment and income profile, 2017

An estimated one in five Canadians (or 6.2 million) aged 15 years and over had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities, according to new findings from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD).

For many of these Canadians, challenges and obstacles in their day-to-day lives may limit their full participation in society. Understanding the challenges faced by persons with disabilities in their personal, employment, or economic situations helps inform government policy.

The CSD is the main source of data on disabilities for those aged 15 years and over. For the 2017 survey, new questions were designed to ensure better overall coverage of persons with disabilities, especially for persons with disability types that are less visible, such as mental health-related and cognitive disabilities.

More than 1 in 10 youth in Canada have one or more disabilities

The prevalence of disabilities among Canadians tends to increase with age. However, more than 540,000 youths aged 15 to 24 years (13%) had one or more disabilities. This compared with 20% or 3.7 million of working age adults (25 to 64 years), and 38% or 2 million of seniors aged 65 and over. Women (24%) were more likely to have a disability than men (20%) and this was the case across all age groups.

More than 4 in 10 Canadians with disabilities have a severe or very severe disability

Severity is a major factor in looking at the lives of persons with disabilities. Those with more severe disabilities often have lower rates of employment, lower income even when employed full-year and full-time, and a greater likelihood of living in poverty regardless of age.

In 2017, 57% of Canadians with disabilities had a "milder" disability (classified as having a mild or moderate disability) and 43% had a "more severe" disability (classified as having a severe or very severe disability). In all cases, the disability was severe enough to limit them to some extent in their daily activities.

Mental health-related and learning disabilities are the most common types of disabilities among youth

The prevalence of disabilities varies at different stages of life. Common to all age groups, however, was the prominence of pain-related disabilities—which were the most prevalent disability type among working age adults and seniors, and the third most prevalent disability among youth.

The most common disability types among seniors were pain, mobility, and flexibility—each affecting about one-quarter of all seniors, often in combination. Among working age adults, 14% had a pain-related disability, and roughly half that percentage had a disability related to mental health, flexibility or mobility (and often in combination).

Mental health-related disabilities (7%) ranked fourth in prevalence among disability types for persons aged 15 years and over, and represented just over 2 million Canadians. In fact, among youth, mental health-related (8%) was the most common type of disability, followed by learning (6%), and pain-related disabilities (4%).

Most Canadians with a disability had more than one type of disability. Of the 6.2 million Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 29% had one type of disability; 38% had two or three disabilities; and 33% had four or more.

About one-third of youth with more severe disabilities are neither in school nor employed

Youth with disabilities are at a higher risk of not being in school or employed, and this increased with the severity of the disability. Understanding the type of disability and its severity is important, then, for supporting youth in making the transition into post-secondary education or the labour market.

About 15% of youth with milder disabilities were neither in school nor employed, compared with about 31% of youth with more severe disabilities.

Among youth with disabilities who were neither in school nor employed, 87% had a mental health-related disability, a learning disability, or both. Since those with mental health-related and/or learning disabilities accounted for 77% of youth with disabilities, this suggests they are disproportionately affected when it comes to being neither in school nor employed.

Persons with very severe disabilities are two-and-a-half times less likely to be employed than those with mild disabilities

In 2017, persons with disabilities faced lower employment rates, particularly for Canadians with very severe disabilities, and those with lower levels of education.

About 59% of working-age adults with disabilities were employed compared with around 80% of those without disabilities. However, as severity of disability increased, the percentage of those employed fell from 76% among those with mild disabilities to 31% among those with very severe disabilities.

The presence of a disability did not preclude older adults (55 to 64 years) from working. The more severe the disability, however, the less likely they were to be employed. In fact, the percentage of employed older adults was lowest for those with more severe disabilities (30%), while it was 58% for those with milder disabilities and 67% for people in the same age bracket without a disability.

Almost one-third of working age adults with more severe disabilities are living in poverty

Overall, persons with disabilities had lower personal income compared to those without disabilities and it varied depending on sex, severity of disability, and household living arrangements.

For example, women aged 25 to 64 years with milder disabilities had median after-tax personal income that was 24% less than their male counterparts and 13% less than women without disabilities.

Among working age adults, personal income was strongly related to the severity of disability. Those with no disabilities had a higher median after-tax personal income (\$39,000) than those with milder disabilities (\$34,300) and those with more severe disabilities (\$19,200).

In addition, among working age adults, 28% of those with more severe disabilities were living below Canada's official poverty line (based on the Market Basket Measure), compared with 14% of those with milder disabilities and 10% of those without disabilities.

The highest rates of poverty (for those aged 15 to 64 years) were among those with more severe disabilities who were living alone or were lone parents. For those living alone, 6 in 10 were below the poverty line, as were 4 in 10 of lone parents. Regardless of disability, 8 in 10 lone parents were women.

Note to readers

Statistics Canada has collected data on disability for more than 30 years, starting with the 1983 Canadian Health and Disability Survey. The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) provides comprehensive data on persons with disabilities by province and territory and age group, as well as disability types and severity of the disability. The survey also collects essential information on supports available to persons with disabilities, the employment profile, income and education of persons with disabilities, as well as other disability-specific topics such as type and severity of disability, use of aids and assistive devices, help received or required, educational attainment, labour force status as well as experiences and accommodations at school or at work.

The survey population comprised Canadians aged 15 years and over as of the 2016 Census of Population (May 10, 2016) and living in private dwellings. It excluded those living in institutions and other collective dwellings, on Canadian Armed Force bases, and on First Nations reserves. The total sample size for the CSD was approximately 50,000 individuals. As the institutionalized population was excluded from the survey, data, particularly for the older age groups, should be interpreted accordingly.

The CSD used Canada's new Disability Screening Questions (DSQ), which were developed between 2010 and 2012. The DSQ are based on the social model of disability. This model defines disability as the relationship between body function and structure, daily activities and social participation, while recognizing the role of environmental factors. In keeping with this framework, the CSD targeted respondents who not only have a difficulty or an impairment due to a long-term condition or health problem, but who also experience a limitation in their daily activities.

The CSD definition of **disability** includes anyone who reported being "sometimes," "often" or "always" limited in their daily activities due to a long-term condition or health problem, as well as anyone who reported being "rarely" limited if they were also unable to do certain tasks or could only do them with a lot of difficulty.

In August 2018, the Government of Canada launched the Poverty Reduction Strategy in which the **Market Basket Measure (MBM)** was announced as Canada's official poverty line. The MBM represents the cost of a basket that includes: a nutritious diet, clothing

and footwear, shelter, transportation, and other necessary goods and services (such as personal care items or household supplies). The cost of the basket is compared to disposable income for each family to determine low income rates.

Products

The article, "[A demographic, employment and income profile of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 years and over, 2017](#)," which is part of the publication *Canadian Survey on Disability Reports* ([Catalogue number 89-654-X](#)), is now available.

The fact sheet "[The evolution of disability data in Canada: Keeping in step with a more inclusive Canada](#)," the infographic "[New Data on Disability in Canada, 2017](#)," and the "[Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017: Concepts and Methods Guide](#)" are also available.

Contact information

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