

The vulnerability of Canadians with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Monday, July 6, 2020

While the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of all Canadians, the Public Health Agency of Canada has identified that certain populations are at an increased risk of infection and of being affected by isolation measures. Canadians with disabilities may be disproportionately impacted as they may be more likely to have underlying health conditions, or to rely on outside caregivers or support to help with their daily lives. Physical distancing measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 may also increase the overall vulnerability of Canadians with disabilities.

Using data from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, it is possible to shed light on the potential impacts and challenges that Canadians with disabilities may experience in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Older Canadians more likely to have a disability

Older Canadians have been identified as a population vulnerable to COVID-19, with those aged 60 and older accounting for one-third of COVID-19 cases nationally. They are also more likely to have disabilities compared with younger age groups. In 2017, 42% of those aged 70 and older (or 1.4 million Canadians) living in private dwellings had one or more disabilities—double the rate for those aged 15 to 69 (20%).

The prevalence of disabilities among those aged 70 and older varied slightly across Canada. The percentage was lower for both Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, compared with the rest of the provinces and territories. Ontario and the territories had higher percentages compared with all the Atlantic provinces. It is important to note that these percentages represent those living in private dwellings and do not include those living in institutions such as long-term care facilities.

Many Canadians with a disability live alone

Isolation measures, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, may have an increased impact on the overall well-being of persons with disabilities. Over one-quarter (28%) of households were lone-person households in 2016, making it the most common household type nationally. Among the 6.2 million Canadians aged 15 and older with disabilities in 2017, 1.3 million (21%) reported that they lived alone.

While "staying at home" has become the new normal for most Canadians since mid-March, for some persons with disabilities, being unable to leave their home environment is not a new concept. In 2017, there were over 770,000 Canadians with disabilities who considered themselves housebound due to their condition.

One in five Canadians with a disability does not use the Internet

Technology can be particularly important for accessing the most up-to-date public health information, benefit programs and services—and for remaining "virtually" connected to family and friends. Just over 90% of Canadians used the Internet in 2018. However, about one-fifth of Canadians with disabilities said that they did not use the Internet, making it more challenging to stay informed and connected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Almost half of those with a disability receive help with daily activities

Many Canadians with disabilities rely on both formal and informal support. In 2017, almost half of those with a disability received help with daily activities because of their condition. This includes help preparing meals, getting to appointments or running errands, or basic medical care at home. Over one-third of those who needed regular help relied solely on family, friends or organizations from outside their household.



Three-quarters of Canadians who considered themselves housebound relied on outside help with their daily activities. When asked why they were housebound, over one-third (38%) said it was due to limited social connections outside the home. The impact of physical distancing may be magnified for those with an already limited social network.

Statistics Canada will continue to monitor the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadians with disabilities by conducting a [crowdsourcing survey](#), from June 23 to July 6, 2020, on those living with long-term conditions and disabilities.

Note to readers

The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability 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 population is comprised of Canadians aged 15 years and older as of the 2016 Census of Population (May 10, 2016) living in private dwellings. This excludes those living in collective dwellings or institutions, such as long-term care homes, retirement facilities, group homes, correctional facilities, etc.

Help received could include help from family members not living with them, friends or neighbours, or both paid and unpaid organizations or individuals.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3251](#).

The infographic "[Persons with disabilities and COVID-19](#)," is now available as part of the *Statistics Canada — Infographics (11-627-M)* series.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).