

The accessibility experiences of Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions within federal sector organizations, 2021

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, August 18, 2021

Participants in the Survey of Accessibility in Federal Sector Organizations (SAFSO) were identified as having a disability through their participation in the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, and some SAFSO participants continue to be considered to have a disability in a similar manner as they were in 2017. Due to the dynamic nature of disability, some SAFSO participants are considered to have difficulties with daily living or long-term conditions but may not be classified as having a disability in the same manner as they were in 2017. For more information, please refer to the "Note to readers" section below.

In the past two years, almost three-quarters (73.0%) of Canadians with a disability, difficulty or long-term condition that limited their daily activities encountered at least one barrier when interacting with organizations or businesses that are governed by federal law.

The [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA) was adopted in 2019 and looks to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility within areas under federal jurisdiction. Understanding the types of barriers and the degree to which they are experienced by the 6.2 million Canadians with a disability is key in attaining the goals of the ACA. A barrier is defined as something that could be changed, removed, modified or done differently. This can include design features of a building, or non-physical barriers such as attitudes, communication, and technology. While increased accessibility benefits everyone, it particularly enables those with disabilities to fully participate in society.

In this context, the Survey on Accessibility in Federal Sector Organizations (SAFSO) was established to provide a snapshot of the barriers faced by Canadians when interacting with different areas under federal jurisdiction. Statistics Canada conducted this project in collaboration with partners from Employment and Social Development Canada to better understand the accessibility experiences of Canadians. Based on the findings, Statistics Canada is releasing an article with more detailed analysis of disaggregated data.

Among older Canadians, men are more likely than women to report an accessibility barrier

For Canadians, many regular activities involve interacting with a [federally regulated business or organization](#), including sending a package, paying a cellphone bill, or using banking services. In fact, the majority (98.2%) of Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions reported interacting with a federal sector organization or business at some point in the past two years. Among the 5.2 million of those who did, almost three-quarters (73.0%) reported encountering at least one type of accessibility barrier.

The proportion who reported barriers within the federal sector was similar across age groups and by gender, with some slight variations. Among those aged 65 years and older, men (77.0%) were more likely than women (71.3%) to report a barrier. Older men (those aged 65 years and older) were also more likely than their younger counterparts to report a barrier, with 77.0% encountering a barrier compared with 70.8% of men aged 19 to 44 years. Canadians living in the Atlantic provinces were less likely to report barriers (69.2%) than those in Ontario (73.2%), the Prairie provinces (73.5%) and British Columbia (75.3%).



Barriers related to wait lines are the most commonly reported transportation barrier

The section of the ACA on transportation has the goal of a barrier-free federal transportation network; this includes airplanes, passenger trains, ferry services, and buses that travel between municipalities, provinces or territories. Among the almost 2.2 million persons with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions who travelled in the past two years, 62.5% faced a barrier while using one of these modes of transportation.

Barriers related to wait lines (34.9%), which include lack of accessible seating, alternative service options or line queues, were experienced the most often by Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions. The other most common transportation barriers reported were challenges using a website to make reservations or look for information (30.0%) and lighting or sound levels (29.7%).

Nearly half of Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions experience technology-related barriers

Another aspect of the ACA focuses on barriers in the area of information and communication technologies (ICT) to ensure that all digital content and technologies are accessible. This includes computers, the Internet, and broadcasting technologies such as radio, television or podcasting. Among the 5.2 million who interacted with a federal organization or business in the past two years, 44.6% reported a barrier related to ICT.

The most common barrier reported was related to using in-person self-serve technology (27.2%), such as ATMs or self-checkouts in retail environments. The second most commonly reported barrier was related to online access to federal government information, services or supports (24.3%). This could include activities such as applying for employment insurance or disability benefits, completing a passport application, or filing tax forms.

About one in five Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions encountered barriers when watching TV shows, movies, or other content through traditional television platforms (22.0%), and when accessing websites of federally regulated businesses (19.1%).

Almost two-thirds of those with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions report communication barriers

Communication, which includes both understanding and being understood by others, is another priority area under the ACA. When interacting with federally regulated organizations or businesses, 61.5% of those with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions reported encountering a communication-related barrier.

The proportion who experienced a communication barrier varied by the type of situation. About two in five Canadians with disabilities, difficulties or long-term conditions reported a barrier in communicating by phone (43.1%), in person (40.5%), and in reading and understanding written materials (40.2%). About one-quarter reported communication barriers while using video conferencing (26.4%) or social media or online chat forums (23.5%).

Note to readers

The Survey on Accessibility in Federal Sector Organizations (SAFSO) was developed by Statistics Canada in collaboration with Employment and Social Development Canada. The data were collected from March 8 to April 10, 2021. This survey is the first national accessibility survey since the [Accessible Canada Act](#) (ACA) was passed, and it provides key information on selected priority areas covered under the ACA. Data collected include information on accessibility-related barriers experienced while using modes of transportation governed by federal law, and while using technology or communicating during interactions within the federal sector.

The survey was conducted under the RapidStats Program offered by Statistics Canada's Centre for Social Data Integration and Development to quickly respond to pressing data needs. The target population of this survey was Canadians with a disability living in one of the ten Canadian provinces who were 15 years of age and older as of May 10, 2016. The survey sampling frame consisted of participants of the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD). The CSD includes a module with the disability screening questions to identify persons with disabilities. As participants' disability status could have changed since 2017 and it would be too burdensome to re-administer the module, the current survey uses the activities of daily living questions to confirm that they currently have difficulties in

one or more areas. Due to the dynamic nature of disability, some participants in this survey continue to be considered to have a disability in a similar manner as they were in 2017, while other participants in this survey are considered to have difficulties with daily living but may not be classified as having a disability in the same manner as they were in 2017.

The total sample size for this survey was 20,000. The survey response rate was 48.1%, which corresponds to 8,886 respondents. Survey sample weights were applied so that the analyses would be representative of the Canadian population.

For more information on the methodology and data limitations, please see [definitions, data sources and methods](#).

For each type of barrier, participants were asked how often they encountered it on a scale of "never," "rarely," "sometimes," "often" or "always," or if it was not applicable. The overall barrier calculations include those who indicated that they experienced at least one type of barrier either "rarely," "sometimes," "often" or "always."

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5345](#).

The article "[Accessibility in Federal Sector Organizations in Canada, 2021](#)", which is part of the publication Canadian Survey on Disability Reports ([89-654-X](#)), is now available.

The video "[The accessibility experiences of Canadians with difficulties or long-term conditions within federal sector organizations, 2021, American Sign Language](#)" is also available.

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).

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