

Profile of disability in 2001

This article is adapted from several Statistics Canada reports released earlier from the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001, including: *A Profile of Disability in Canada, 2001*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-577; *Disability Supports in Canada, 2001*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-580; *Children with Disabilities and Their Families*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-585; and *Education, Employment and Income of Adults with and without Disabilities*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-587. These releases were prepared by Behnaz Behnia, Lucie Cossette and Renée Langlois from Statistics Canada and Edith Duclos from Human Resources Development Canada.

Disabilities that limit everyday activities may have a profound impact on peoples' lives. They vary in severity and tend to become more common and severe with age. They affect different aspects of people's lives with impacts on mobility, agility, independence, the ability to find and hold a job, income levels, leisure activities, psychological well-being and other dimensions of life. As anyone with a child who has disabilities can attest, people's disabilities can also affect the lives of their caregivers.

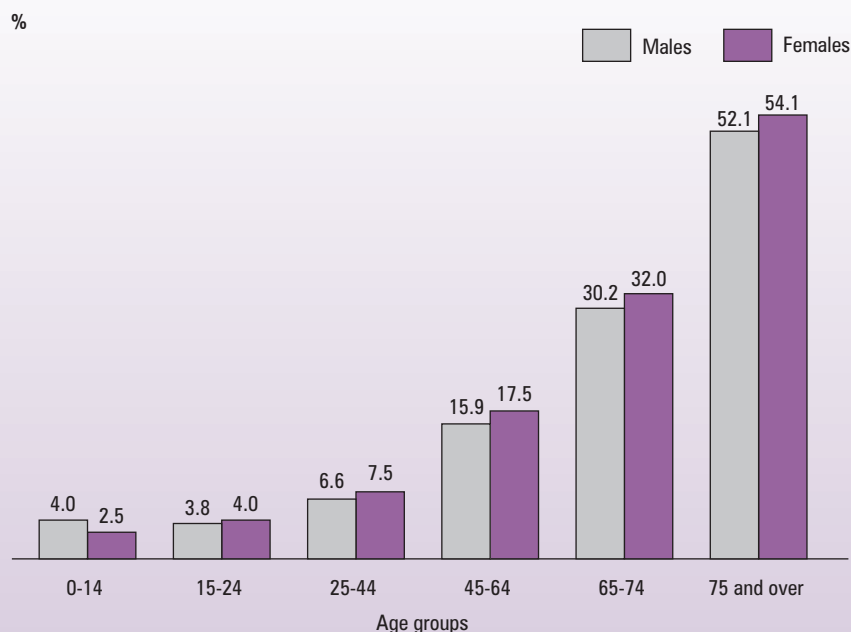
This article profiles disability in Canada using data from the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). It looks at the prevalence of disability in the Canadian population, the severity of disability, types of disability, the impact of child disabilities on parental employment, the need for specialized aids for help with everyday activities, and for specialized modifications to homes, barriers to travel and the impact of disabilities on economic well-being. Persons with disabilities include those who report having difficulties with

CST What you should know about this study

The Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) is a post-censal survey that sampled about 43,000 people (35,000 adults and 8,000 children) with disabilities whose everyday activities are limited because of a health-related condition or problem. Human Resources Development Canada funded the survey, which took place between September 2001 and January 2002. The survey covers persons residing in private households in the 10 provinces, and excludes people living in institutions and on Indian reserves. Persons with disabilities include those who report having difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicate that a physical, mental or health condition reduces the kind or amount of activities they could do. The respondents' answers to the disability questions represent their perception of the situation and are therefore subjective.

Severity of disability

The severity of disability is based on the intensity and frequency of activity limitations reported by the respondent. For each type of disability, a single score is computed and then standardized. The overall disability score for each respondent is the average score of all disability types. For school-aged children (aged 5 to 14) and adults, these overall scores are divided into four groups — mild, moderate, severe and very severe. For children under age 5, severity of disability scores is divided into two groups — mild to moderate and severe to very severe.



Source: Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001.

daily living activities, or who indicate that a physical, mental or health condition reduces the kind or amount of activities they could do.

One in eight Canadians has disabilities

In 2001, 3.6 million Canadians living in households experienced limitations in their everyday activities because of physical, psychological or health conditions. This represents a disability rate of 12%. Not surprisingly, the disability rate increases with age. About 3% of children aged 0 to 14 have a disability, compared with 53% of seniors aged 75 and over. In general, women over age 25 have slightly higher disability rates than men in this age group.

Disabilities of children often affect their parents' employment

Among children aged 0 to 4, 26,000 have a disability representing 2% of all children in this age group. Developmental delay¹ is the most common

type of disability for children in this age group, experienced by about two-thirds of children under age 5 with disabilities. Three in five young children are also limited in their activities because of a chronic health condition.

About 155,000 children aged 5 to 14 have a disability, representing a 4% disability rate. Chronic health conditions² and learning disabilities are the two most common forms of disability among these school-aged children. About 66,000 school-aged children experience severe to very severe disabilities.

One in four school-aged children with disabilities receive help with everyday activities including personal care, such as bathing, dressing, feeding or moving within the home, because of a condition or health problem. Mothers provide most of the personal care for 62% of children requiring care while both mothers and fathers provide it in 30% of the cases. Only in 3% of the cases did the father primarily provide help.

Children's disabilities have an impact on the entire family. Parents of 84,000 school-aged children with disabilities report that their child's condition has an impact on their family's employment situation.³ Not surprisingly, this impact is greater in families where children have more severe disabilities. About 40% of children with mild to moderate disabilities have family members whose employment is affected by the child's disability, while among children with severe to very severe disabilities the proportion is 73%. Because mothers are usually the primary caregiver for their children, it is their employment that is most often affected by their child's condition. Households with disabled children had a lower household income than households without disabled children. Parents may work fewer hours or choose jobs based on the availability of flexible hours rather than high pay. On average, in 2000, households of children with disabilities had 88% of the income of households of children without disabilities.

Depending on the type of disability and its severity, children may use specialized aids. Specialized aids such as hearing aids, wheelchairs, magnifiers and voice amplifiers may help a child with daily activities. Of the 155,000

1. Developmental delay refers to children who are delayed in their physical, intellectual or another type of development. Of the 1% of young children with developmental delay, 59% had a delay in their intellectual development, 54% in their physical development and 38% had other types of delay such as speech difficulties.
2. Examples of chronic health conditions, which limit everyday activities, are asthma or severe allergies, complex medical care needs, cerebral palsy, migraines, autism, heart condition or disease, and attention deficit disorders with or without hyperactivity.
3. Examples of an impact on employment include situations where family members had to work fewer hours or change their work hours to a different time of day or night in order to take care of the child.

school-aged children with disabilities, about 94,000 or three out of every five required specialized aids, according to their parents. Of those requiring specialized aids, about 37% had some but needed more, and about 15% did not have any but needed some. Cost was a contributing factor for about half the children with unmet needs for specialized aids.

While specialized aids help the child with daily activities, parents may also need help with housework, or time off for personal activities because of their child's condition. Help can come from family, friends and neighbours and from government organizations and agencies. About 52,000 children with disabilities have parents who need help with housework, family responsibilities and time off for personal activities because of their child's condition. Of these, about one third or 18,000 receive all the help they need, while parents of 34,000 (65%) children with disabilities have unmet needs for help. Once again, cost contributes to preventing parents from getting help (71%), but the unavailability of help from family and friends is also a factor for many (62%).

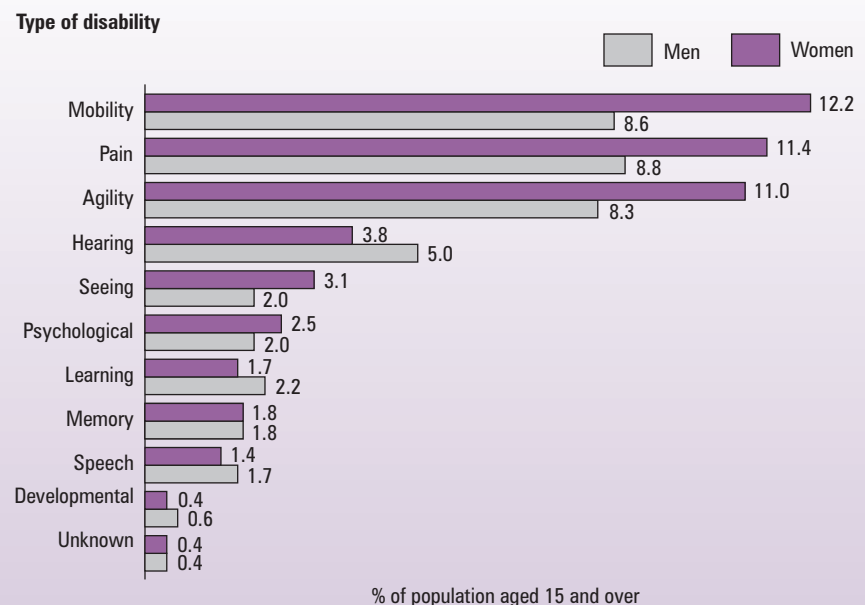
One in seven adults has disabilities
About 3.4 million adults aged 15 and over or 15% of the adult population have a disability. People have various levels of severity of disability varying from mild to very severe. About one third of these adults (1.2 million) have a mild degree of activity limitation, one quarter (860,000) have a moderate level, one quarter have a severe level (920,000) and one seventh have a very severe disability (480,000). Like the number of disabilities, the severity of disabilities increases with age. Men are more likely than women to experience a mild degree of limitation, whereas a higher proportion of women experience a severe level.

CST Government disability initiatives

Governments have implemented policies to address issues of equality and access to the workplace and the costs of disability. The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* of our Constitution guarantees persons with disabilities the right to equality and to equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination. The *Canadian Human Rights Act* ensures that federal employers and service providers are supportive of, and accessible to, persons with disabilities. Federal-provincial-territorial agreements under the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) initiative reflect an increased focus on helping people with disabilities prepare for, find and keep jobs.^{1,2} Other measures, such as the Disability Tax Credit, reduce federal income tax for taxpayers with severe and prolonged disabilities. The Medical Expenses Tax Credit provides tax relief for people who have sustained significant medical expenses.

1. Government of Canada. 2002. *Future directions to address disability issues for the Government of Canada: Working together for full citizenship*. <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sp-ps/socialp-psociale/reports/disability/futdire.pdf> (accessed Sept. 24, 2003).
2. EAPD funding depends on local priorities and the needs of people with disabilities. Examples of funded interventions include employment counselling and assessment, employment planning, pre-employment training, postsecondary education, skills training, assistive aids and devices, wage subsidies or earning supplements and other workplace supports.

CST Mobility and pain-related disabilities are most prevalent among those aged 15 and over



Source: Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, 2001.

Disability takes many forms

About 2.5 million adults have mobility-related disabilities and have difficulty walking, climbing stairs, carrying an object for a short distance, or moving from one room to another. Regardless of age, women are more likely than men to have a mobility-related disability. Some 2.4 million adults (10%) have activity limitations related to chronic pain,⁴ which is more prevalent among women (11%) than among men (9%). In fact, pain-related disability is the most common form of disability among the working-age population, affecting 8% of persons aged 15 to 64. Another 2.3 million or 10% of adults have agility difficulties such as bending down to pick up an object, getting dressed or undressed, or cutting one's food.

About 1 million adults (4%) have a hearing-related disability while about 590,000 have vision difficulties (3%) and 360,000 report a speech-related disability.⁵ Hearing limitations are more common among men, while women are more likely to have vision difficulties. About 520,000 adults have psychological disabilities and 450,000 report learning disabilities.

Mobility, agility, hearing, vision and pain disabilities increase in prevalence with age whereas disabilities related to psychological problems and learning disabilities are most prominent in the 45 to 64 age group. Women live longer than men and therefore outnumber men in the senior age groups, where mobility, pain and agility disabilities are more prevalent. This may partially explain why women have much higher disability rates than men for these types of disabilities.

Nearly half of adults with disabilities need specialized aids and services

Specialized aids and services enable persons with disabilities to carry out their everyday activities, such as getting around (wheelchair, hand or arm support) or by helping them to hear, see or speak (hearing aid, Braille reading

materials, keyboard device for communicating).⁶ Of the 3.4 million adults aged 15 and over with disabilities, nearly half (1.6 million) need specialized aids and devices. The majority of adults requiring specialized aids (61%) have all the aids they need; however, 29% use aids but need more, and 10% have none of their needed aids.

The more severe the disability, the more likely adults requiring specialized aids report having unmet needs. Only 10% of those with mild disabilities requiring specialized aids have some but not all of the aids they need. This percentage climbed to 50% for those with very severe disabilities. Regardless of the severity of the disability, 10% have none of the specialized aids they need. Cost or lack of insurance coverage are the most frequent reasons given to explain why adults with disabilities have unmet needs for specialized aids.

Adults with disabilities often need help with their everyday activities

Some 2.2 million adults with disabilities reported requiring help with everyday activities.⁷ About two-thirds of this group receive all the help they require, but 35% or 765,000 have unmet needs for help. Help comes from many sources. According to PALS, 63% of adults with disabilities who receive help get it from members of their family living with them, 42% receive it from family members not living with them, 24% from friends or neighbours, 22% from organizations or agencies, and 14% from other sources.⁸

Of those with unmet needs, over half cite cost as the reason for not getting needed help. One quarter indicate that help from family and friends is not available and a quarter indicate that the cost of help is not covered by their insurance plan. Lastly, just under a quarter of respondents do not know how to obtain the help they need, suggesting that many adults with disabilities do not know about available resources for assistance.

Most people with disabilities have all the home modifications they need

Adults with disabilities can live more easily if their home has specialized features to help them with their activity limitations. Special features such as handrails, visual or audio alarms, adapted bathrooms and accessibility aids such as ramps or lifts can help. In 2001, 483,000 adults with disabilities needed special features in their dwelling. Most of them (63%) have all the modifications they need, 26% have none of their needed modifications and 11% have some but need more. High costs or lack of insurance coverage are the most common reasons for unmet needs. Persons with more severe disabilities are more likely to have unmet needs for special features in their home than people with mild disabilities.

Travel is a barrier for some adults with disabilities

Travel enables people to visit family and friends, attend appointments, participate in recreational and volunteer

4. Persons who have pain but who did not associate it with any activity limitation are not considered to have a pain-related disability.

5. Hearing-related disabilities refer to difficulty hearing one other person in a conversation with three or more persons or in a telephone conversation when using a hearing aid if needed. Vision difficulties refer to difficulty seeing ordinary newsprint or clearly seeing the face of someone from 4 metres (12 feet) when wearing glasses or contact lenses if needed.

6. Assistive aids do not include glasses and contact lenses, as most people who use them report not having activity limitations caused by their visual problems.

7. Examples of everyday activities include: meal preparation, housework, heavy household chores, transportation for grocery shopping or getting to appointments, personal finances, child care, personal care and moving around within the home.

8. Help can come from more than one source.

activities, find and retain a job and live independently. For most people with disabilities, their condition does not pose problems with transportation. According to PALS, during the 12 months preceding the survey, 135,000 adults with disabilities (4%) could not use public transportation services, while 59,000 (2%) could not travel locally by car.⁹ Another 179,000 who used public transportation had some difficulty.

An even larger number of adults with disabilities experienced problems with long distance travel. About 270,000 adults with disabilities are completely prevented from travelling long distances. Of the 1.2 million adults with disabilities who travel long distances only by car, about 32% have difficulties during those trips because of their condition.

Adults with disabilities have high unemployment rates

Accessible transportation is one of the barriers faced by adults with disabilities, but other barriers also limit participation in society. There are barriers that limit physical access to buildings and facilities, to training necessary for jobs and to technologies that assist persons with disabilities to find and keep jobs.

According to PALS, the result of these barriers is that many adults with disabilities are unemployed and are more likely to live at the bottom of the income scale. In 2001, the unemployment rate among adults aged 25 to 54 with disabilities was 10.7%, compared with 5.9% for adults the same age without disabilities. For adults aged 25 to 54 with disabilities, 47% have personal income below \$15,000, compared with 25% of adults without disabilities.

Part of the reason for the lower income of adults with disabilities and higher unemployment rates may be the lower educational attainment of adults with disabilities. In 2001, 14% of adults aged 25 to 54 with disabilities

had a university education while 30% had not obtained a high school diploma. In contrast, those without disabilities were nearly twice as likely to have a university education (25%) and were much less likely to have not obtained a high school diploma (18%). Although efforts have been made to reduce barriers to education for young adults with disabilities, half (51%) of 15- to 24-year-olds with a disability have not completed high school, compared with 42% of those without disabilities.¹⁰

Summary

Large numbers of Canadians have various disabilities, especially limitations related to mobility, agility and pain. Many disabilities increase in prevalence and severity with age. As the Canadian population ages, Canada may face rising numbers of people with more severe disabilities. This occurs at a time when families are getting smaller and more widely dispersed, so the traditional network of family care is not as strong.

People with disabilities seem to be at a disadvantage in the labour market, partly related to their lower levels of education. They have higher unemployment rates and are more likely to have low personal income.

9. Public transportation services include buses, specialized buses, subways and taxis.

10. Some 15- to 24-year-olds are still attending school and may eventually obtain a high school diploma or higher qualification.



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