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Canadian Survey on Disability

Accessibility Findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017

by Rebecca Choi

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Accessibility Findings from the Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017

by **Rebecca Choi**

Key Findings

- Among Canadians with disabilities aged 15 and older who considered themselves housebound, 17.8% said it was due to the unavailability of specialized transportation.
- Among those with physical disabilities, 44.9% required at least one type of aid or assistive device or an accessibility feature within their home.
- Among those who did not use the Internet, 18.2% of persons with disabilities said it was due to at least one information and technology communication (ICT) related reason.
- Over one in ten Canadians with disabilities (11.7%) used a cellphone, smartphone or smartwatch with specialized features or a computer, laptop or tablet with specialized software or adaptations because of their condition.
- Of employees with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, 18.2% believed their condition made it difficult to change their current job or business due to difficulty in obtaining required supports or accommodations.

Introduction

The *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA) passed in 2019 with the intention of creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040. By identifying, removing and preventing accessibility barriers, the ACA will ensure accessibility standards are met within the areas of employment, built environment, information communication and technology (ICT), communication, procurement of goods, design and delivery of programs and services, and transportation within federally regulated organizations or businesses.

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), there are 6.2 million Canadians aged 15 and older who have a disability. This factsheet presents findings from the 2017 CSD related to accessibility barriers that persons with disabilities may have encountered within the areas of transportation, the built environment, information and communication technologies (ICT) and employment.

Transportation

While many Canadians regularly use busses, planes, or trains to get around, persons with disabilities may require specialized transportation or accommodations while using these modes of transportation. Among youth with disabilities aged 15 to 24 years, 6.7% (or 32,500 students) required specialized transportation to attend school.¹ Men (9.6%) were more likely to require this type of transportation compared to women (4.7%).^{2,3} Those with more severe disabilities (17.4%) were more likely to have required specialized transportation compared to those with less severe disabilities (2.2%).⁴ Among those who required specialized transportation, more than four in five (81.9%) reported to having this type of transportation available to them.

Text box 1 Global Severity Class

A global severity score was developed for the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), which took into account the number of disability types that a person has, the level of difficulty experienced in performing certain tasks, and the frequency of activity limitations. To simplify the concept of severity, four severity classes were established: mild, moderate, severe, and very severe. It is important to understand, however, that the name assigned to each class is simply intended to facilitate use of the severity score and is not a label or judgement concerning the person's level of disability. In this fact sheet, mild and moderate classes were collapsed into "**less severe**" and severe and very severe classes were collapsed into "**more severe**".

Among employed Canadians with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, one-fifth (20.6%) indicated an interest in job-related training courses. However, 14.1% reported that inadequate transportation prevented them from doing so.⁵ Furthermore, 2.0%, of employed persons with disabilities did not want to take any work-related training courses due to a transportation barrier.⁶

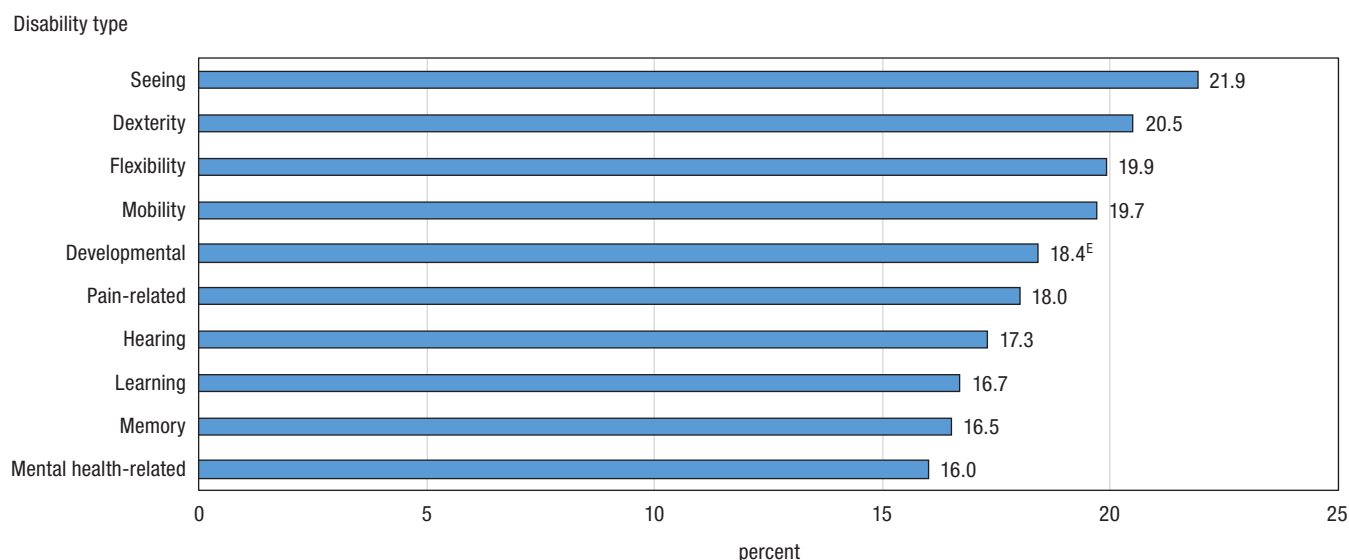
Over one-quarter (29.3%) of persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years reported that they could not move to another city, town or community to improve their job or career options. Of those who could not move to improve their job opportunities, 8.0% indicated it was due to transportation or transit. Those with more severe disabilities (12.1%) were more likely to report that transportation or transit limited their labour mobility compared to those with less severe disabilities (5.7%).

1. Includes respondents who were currently attending school, college, CEGEP or university in 2017, or who last attended school, college, CEGEP or university either in 2016 or 2017, or between 2012 and 2015 and who had their condition when they were attending school.
2. Note that proportion of women with disabilities who required specialized transportation had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.
3. In the survey, the question was asked in the following way: "Are you....?" Respondents were asked to select male or female. Separate questions on sex at birth and gender were not asked in 2017.
4. Note that proportion of those with less severe disabilities who required specialized transportation had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.
5. Note that proportion of those who indicated that inadequate transportation prevented them from taking training had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.
6. Note that proportion among employees with disabilities who did not take training courses due to transportation barrier had a coefficient variation (CV) between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.

Among persons with disabilities who were not in the labour force, aged 25 to 64 years, around 82,130 (5.8%) felt discouraged to find a job and have experienced a barrier due to the lack of specialized transportation. In addition, among those looking for work, 24.7% reported difficulty finding work because they did not have the means of transportation to get to the available job.⁷ When examined by grouped disability type,⁸ 31.2% of those with sensory disabilities,⁹ 28.9% of those with physical disabilities,¹⁰ 26.6% of those with pain-related disabilities, 31.7% of those with mental health-related disabilities and 40.4% of those with cognitive disabilities,¹¹ reported not having the means of transportation to get to available jobs.

Previous analysis found that 770,000 Canadians with disabilities considered themselves housebound due to their condition.¹² Among those with disabilities aged 15 and older, just over one-sixth (17.8%) said it was due to the unavailability of specialized transportation. There were no significant differences between age groups or by sex in terms of accessible transportation being the reason they consider themselves housebound. When examined by type of disability,¹³ the proportion of those who are housebound due to not having transportation available to them ranged from 21.9% among those with seeing disabilities to 16.0% among those with mental health-related disabilities (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Housebound due to unavailability of accessible transportation, persons with disabilities aged 15 years and older, by disability type, Canada, 2017



^E use with caution

Notes: The sum of the disability types does not equal 100% because persons can have more than one type of disability. Due to low sample size, data for the category of unknown disability type are not presented.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

7. This include respondents who did not have a job or business in the reference week, or respondents who had a job or business in the reference week but were absent because of seasonal layoff or due to job being casual with no work currently available, and who looked for work in the four weeks previous, or respondents who were starting a job within four weeks from the end of the reference week.
 8. It is important to note that people could have reported multiple disability types, therefore the data is based upon the impact of all disability types these individuals may have.
 9. Sensory disability includes seeing and hearing disability types.
 10. Physical disability includes mobility, flexibility, and dexterity disability types.
 11. Cognitive disability includes learning, developmental and memory disability types.
 12. [Persons with disabilities and COVID-19](#), Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.
 13. Excludes the unknown disability type category.

Built Environment

The built environment consists of all buildings and public spaces, and can include features such as widened hallways, doorways, adaptive washrooms or sloped curbs. Among youth with disabilities aged 15 to 24 years, 8.5% required adapted or modified building features to attend school.¹⁴ The most commonly reported modified building features required were accessible classrooms (37.3%), followed by accessible buildings, excluding residences (21.2%) and adapted washrooms (18.9%). The most commonly reported modified building features that were made available to students were accessible classrooms (50.5%). In contrast, 25.0% of those who required adaptable washrooms and 21.8% of those who required accessible buildings, excluding residence reported they were made available to them.¹⁵

A Statistics Canada report found that more than one-third (37.3%) of employees with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years required at least one type of workplace accommodation.¹⁶ This includes 175,070 (or 6.0%) employees with disabilities who needed building modifications or adaptation features, such as accessible parking or elevators.¹⁷ Employees with more severe (14.9%) disabilities were more likely to require at least one type of building modification or feature compared to those with less severe disabilities (2.2%).

More than half (55.8%) of Canadians with disabilities aged 15 and older reported to having a physical disability in 2017.¹⁸ Among those with physical disabilities, 44.9% required at least one type of aid or assistive device or an accessibility feature within their home. Examples of these built environment aids or features could include access ramps, walk-in bath or shower, lift device or elevator, lowered counters, or automatic doors. Women were more likely than men to require an accessibility feature in their home across all age groups, except for among youth (Chart 2). Among both men and women, those aged 65 and older were the most likely to use at least one type of aid or assistive device within their home (55.3% of men, 69.6% of women).

14. Includes respondents who were currently attending school, college, CEGEP or university in 2017, or who last attended school, college, CEGEP or university either in 2016 or 2017, or between 2012 and 2015 and who had their condition when they were attending school.

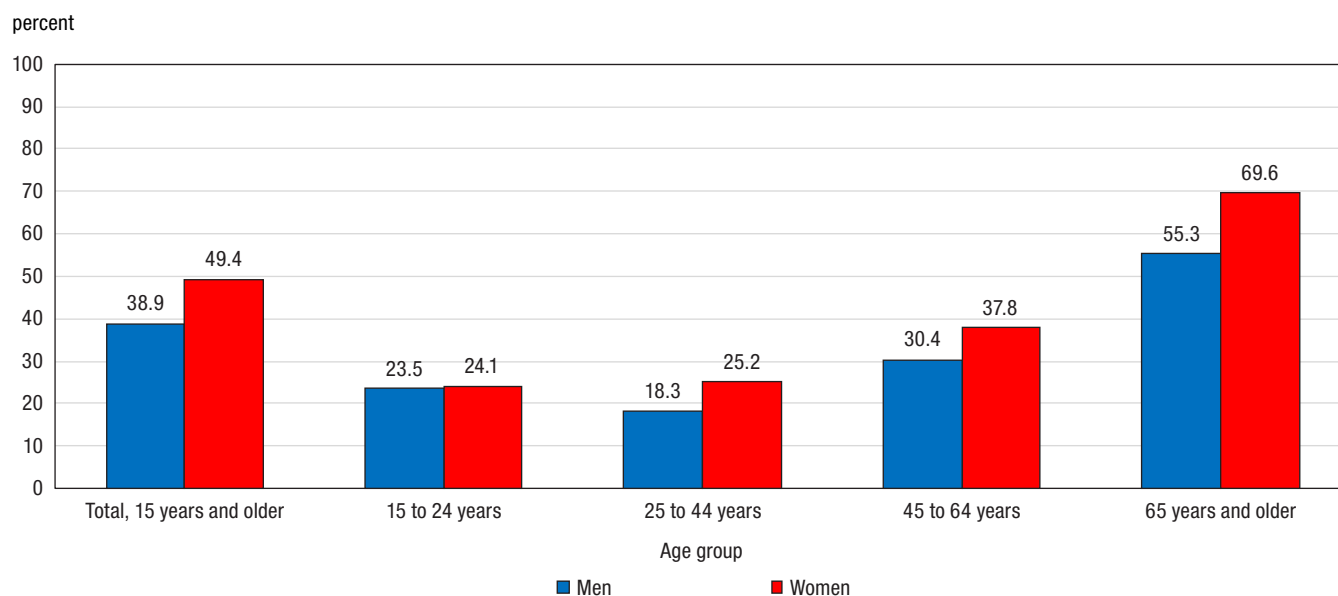
15. Note that proportion of those reporting accessible buildings, excluding residences were made available to them had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.

16. [Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada](#), Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

17. Workplace building features include handrails, ramps, widened doorways or hallways, adapted or accessible parking, accessible elevators, or adapted washrooms.

18. Persons with physical disabilities include those who have difficulty with mobility, flexibility and dexterity such as moving around, bending or reaching in any direction even while using an aid.

Chart 2
Proportion requiring a built environment accessibility aid or feature, persons with physical disabilities aged 15 years and older, by age group and sex, Canada, 2017



Notes: Physical disability includes mobility, flexibility, and dexterity disability types. Built environment accessibility aids or features include bathroom aids (e.g., raised toilet seat or grab bars), a walk-in bath or shower, an access ramp or a ground level entrance, a lift device or elevator, automatic or easy to open doors, widened doorways or hallways, lowered counters in kitchen or bathroom.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

The most commonly used aids or assistive devices related to building modification or adaptation features, were bathroom aids (such as raised toilet or grab bars) (31.7%), a walk in bath or shower (16.9%), and an access ramp or ground-level entrance (12.4%). Over one in ten (13.0%) of those with physical disabilities indicated there were aids and assistive devices that they needed but did not have. In terms of built environment-related aids or features, the most commonly reported unmet needs were for a walk-in bath or shower (29.0%) and for bathroom aids (20.5%).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

As technology has become a larger part of Canadians' lives, the ACA aims to make information and communication technologies (ICT) more accessible by having accessible digital content and technologies. Examples of ICT include the Internet, websites, computers, software, cellphones and broadcasting technologies.

While the majority (80.5%) of Canadians with disabilities in 2017 used the Internet, 19.5% reported they did not. Older Canadians with disabilities were less likely than their younger counterparts to use the Internet. Just over half (56.3%) of those aged 65 years and older reported that they used the Internet, compared to 87.5% of those aged 45 to 64 years, 95.5% of those aged 35 to 44 years, 97.1% of those aged 25 to 34 years and 98.4% of those aged 15 to 24 years.

Among those who did not use the Internet, almost one-fifth (18.2%) of persons with disabilities indicated they did not use the Internet due to at least one ICT-related reason.¹⁹ Looking across grouped disability types, the proportion reporting ICT-related issues using the Internet was 17.9% among those with physical disabilities and those with mental health-related disabilities, 17.5% for those with sensory disabilities, 16.7% among those with pain-related disabilities and 15.9% for those with cognitive disabilities.

19. ICT-related reasons include no internet-ready devices available dwelling such as desktop, laptop, or tablet computer, no internet service available in the area, require specialized adaptations or software, too many websites are inaccessible.

When examined by ICT-related reasons, no Internet-ready devices available in their dwelling, such as a desktop, laptop or tablet computer (15.7%) was the most common reason, followed by no Internet service available in their area (1.7%) and they required specialized adaptations or software (1.5%).^{20,21} Among persons with disabilities, 2.6% needed a type of specialized software or other adaptation to access the Internet.²² Of those who required these accessibility features, 70.0% reported that they did not have all the specialized software or adaptations they needed.

Technology-based aids and assistive devices help prevent barriers for persons with disabilities.²³ Among youth with disabilities aged 15 to 24 years, almost half (48.1%) required at least one type of aid or assistive device or accommodation to follow their school courses.²⁴ Those with more severe disabilities (69.0%) were more likely to require an aid or accommodation in school compared to those with less severe disabilities (39.4%).

Among those who required an aid, device or accommodation, about half (52.3%) of students with disabilities required a technology-related aid or assistive device.²⁵ Men (58.1%) were more likely than women (46.7%) to require a technology-related aid or device. The likelihood of requiring a technology-based aid or device to attend school increased as the number of disability types a person had increased. Those with one disability type (34.9%) were less likely than those with two or three disability types (52.5%) and those with four or more disability types (69.3%) to require a technology-related aid or device.

The most commonly required technology-related aids or assistive devices were a computer, laptop or tablet with specialized software or other adaptations (43.6%), recording equipment or portable note-taking device (26.6%), or a device for playing audio books or e-books (20.2%) (Table 1). Students with disabilities most commonly reported having unmet needs for a device for playing audio books or e-books (52.0%) and recording equipment or a portable note taking device (46.3%).

Table 1
Type of information and communication technology (ICT) assistive device or accommodation needed to attend school, persons with disabilities aged 15 to 24 years, Canada, 2017

Type of ICT-related assistive device or accommodation	number	percent
Cell phone, smartphone or smartwatch with specialized features	46,500	19.9
Computer, laptop or tablet with specialized software or other adaptations	101,940	43.6
Recording equipment or a portable note-taking device	62,140	26.6
Device for playing audio books or e-books	47,170	20.2
Textbooks in e-format	36,940	15.8
Closed-circuit devices (e.g., CCTV)	F	F

F too unreliable to be published

Notes: Includes respondents who were currently attending school, college, CEGEP or university in 2017, or who last attended school, college, CEGEP or university either in 2016 or 2017, or between 2012 and 2015 and who had their condition when they were attending school.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017.

The CSD asked all respondents about their use of various aids, devices and specialized equipment for any of their conditions, as well as about ones used for specific disability types. An assistive device is any device or tool designed or adapted to help a person perform a particular task or activity. Overall, among those aged 15 years and older, 11.7% used a cellphone, smartphone or smartwatch with specialized features or a computer, laptop or tablet with specialized software or adaptations because of their condition. Among those who used a phone or computer device, 39.3% had a device with speech-to-text, text-to-speech or voice recognition software, 30.0% had one with a screen magnification software, and 16.4% had a device with a screen reader. About one-quarter (25.2%) of persons with disabilities used a device for playing audio books or e-books and 83.3% reported the audio or e-books were available in an accessible format for them.

20. Note that proportion of those with no Internet service available in their area had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.

21. Note that proportion of those who required specialized adaptations or software had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.

22. Respondents who used and did not use the Internet were asked if they needed a type of specialized software or other adaptation to access the Internet.

23. Technology-based aids and assistive devices include cellphone, smartphones, or smartwatch with specialized features to help with their condition, computer, laptop or table with specialized software or other adaptations to help with their condition, recording equipment or a portable note-taking device, device for playing audio books or e-books, textbooks in e-format, or closed circuit devices.

24. Includes respondents who were currently attending school, college, CEGEP or university in 2017, or who last attended school, college, CEGEP or university either in 2016 or 2017, or between 2012 and 2015 and who had their condition when they were attending school.

25. Technology-based aids or devices include a cell phone, smartphone or smartwatch with specialized features, a computer, laptop or tablet with specialized software or other adaptations, recording equipment or a portable note-taking device, a device for playing audio books or e-books, textbooks in e-format, and closed-circuit devices.

About two in five (41.7%) Canadians with hearing disabilities reported using at least one type of technology-based aid or assistive device for their hearing condition. Older Canadians aged 65 and older (49.8%) with a hearing disability were the most likely to use a hearing technology-based aid or assistive device compared to all other age groups. Those with more severe hearing disabilities (58.2%) were more likely to require this type of aid or device compared to those with less severe hearing disabilities (37.5%). Among those with a hearing disability, more than one-quarter (29.6%) indicated that they needed an aid or assistive device but did not have it.

Among Canadians with a vision disability, 10.8% used one or more technology-based assistive devices for their condition. Those with more severe vision disabilities (24.0%) were three times more likely than those with less severe vision disabilities (6.9%) to require a technology-related aid or device. The most commonly reported aids or assistive devices used were devices with oversized buttons, such as remote controls or telephones (6.1%), followed by audio or described video for television programs (3.5%) and recording equipment or portable note-taking devices (2.6%). Among those who reported they needed an aid or device but did not have it, 14.0% indicated they had an unmet need for a technology-related aid or assistive device.

Among Canadians with learning or developmental disabilities, 16.3% used at least one type of technology-based aid or assistive device for their condition. When looking at the type of aid or assistive device, 12.4% required recording equipment or a portable note-taking device and 7.3% required a portable spell checker.²⁶ Among those with learning or developmental disabilities who indicated they had an unmet need for an aid or assistive device, 54.5% indicated they needed but did not have a technology-based aid or device.

Employment

Access to employment opportunities and accessible workplaces is another key area under the ACA. In 2017, among employees with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, 18.2% believed their condition made it difficult to change their current jobs or businesses due to difficulty in obtaining required supports or accommodations. Those with more severe disabilities (24.1%) were more likely to report the reason of a difficulty in obtaining the necessary supports compared to those with less severe disabilities (13.9%). Among the one-fifth of employed persons with disabilities who showed interest in taking work-related training, 6.9% were prevented from taking it due to the courses not being adapted to the needs of their condition.²⁷ Almost 40,000 (4.0%) employed persons with disabilities did not want to take work-related training courses due to the course not being adapted to their condition.

Among those who were completely prevented from working at a job or business due to their condition, aged 25 to 64 years, 14.4% indicated there was some type of workplace accommodation or modification that would enable them to work at a paid job or business, such as modified or different duties or technical aids. Among those who encountered barriers in looking for work, 7.3% reported they were discouraged to look for work due to accessibility issues when applying to jobs. Those with more severe disabilities (9.1%) were more likely to report accessibility challenges during the job application process compared to their less severe counterparts (4.0%).²⁸

Conclusion

Persons with disabilities have experienced various forms of accessibility within their schools, workplaces, and homes. The factsheet provides accessibility-related findings from the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) that align with four of the seven priorities from the *Accessible Canada Act* (ACA). These priorities include transportation, built environment, information and communication technology (ICT) and employment. The results show some key differences in accessibility experiences by age group, sex, type of disability and severity of disability among persons with disabilities. While there was some variation within the other characteristics, generally those with more severe disabilities were more likely to require various accessibility-based aids, devices, and specialized equipment compared to those with less severe disabilities.

26. Excludes cellphones or smartphones.

27. Note that proportion of those who were prevented from taking training courses due to course not being adapted to their needs had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.

28. Note that proportion of those with less severe disabilities who had accessibility issues when applying for work had a coefficient variation between 16.6% to 33.3%; use with caution.

Many students with disabilities, aged 15 to 24 years, required various accessibility features or supports to follow their courses. The majority of students with disabilities had their needs met for specialized transportation to get to school while the need for certain built environment features were less likely to be met. When looking at ICT-related supports, the likelihood of requiring a technology- or communication-based aid, device or accommodation increased as the number of disability types a student with a disability had increased.

There were several accessibility-related barriers encountered by the working age population as well. Some persons with disabilities reported a lack of access to the appropriate transportation impacted their job mobility, others were discouraged from finding a job or reported difficulty finding work due to a lack of specialized transportation. Workplace accommodations can help to reduce some of the barriers persons with disabilities may encounter in their work environment. Among employees with disabilities who required a workplace accommodation, over 175,000 needed a building modification or an adaptation feature in their workspace. Those with more severe disabilities were more likely than their less severe counterparts to report challenges changing jobs due to difficulty in obtaining the necessary supports or accommodations.

Aids and assistive devices can help persons with disabilities perform certain tasks or activities and many reported the use of an ICT-related aid or device for their condition. There were some variations across disability types in terms of the proportion who required an ICT-related aid or device, however, in most cases those with the more severe type of disability were more likely to require an ICT-related aid or device compared to those with the less severe type of disability. Many persons with physical disabilities required built environment-related aids or modifications in their home. Older Canadians were the most likely to require these accessibility features in their home. The most commonly reported unmet needs for this type of modification or feature were for a walk-in bath or shower and other bathroom aids, such as a raised toilet or grab bars.

A limitation of the current study is that the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) was not specifically designed to focus on accessibility. As a result, the data cannot provide a comprehensive look at all the accessibility experiences of Canadians with disabilities. However, in the next iteration of the CSD in 2022, the survey will include questions related to the accessibility barriers encountered by persons with disabilities. Using the 2022 CSD data, further research should consist of a more detailed look at the other priority areas of the ACA. Future analysis should also consider more disaggregated analyses such as Indigenous identity, sexual orientation, and visible minority groups. Along with other data sources and initiatives, this will help measure the level of accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities as well as the progress towards a barrier-free Canada.

Data Source and Methodology

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.

The Canadian Survey on Disability identifies persons with disabilities using the Disability Screening Questions (DSQ), which are based on the social model of disability. The DSQ first measures the degree to which difficulties are experienced across 10 domains of functioning, then ask how often daily activities are limited by these difficulties. Only persons who report a limitation in their day-to-day activities are identified as having a disability. For more detailed information on the DSQ, please see the *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017: Concepts and Methods Guide*.