

American Community Survey (ACS)

Why We Ask: Disability

We ask questions about a person's difficulty with specific daily living tasks to produce disability statistics. These statistics are used by federal agencies to understand the population with disabilities, to monitor against discrimination, and to distribute funds, provide services, and develop programs for people with disabilities.

The term "disability" was first used in the 1880 Census, although the concept of disability was not the same as the concept that we use today. The six questions on the ACS are designed to identify limitations in the four basic areas of functioning (vision, hearing, mobility, and cognitive functioning), as well as self-care, and independent living. The estimates from these questions can be analyzed individually or combined as one measure to assess the equalization of opportunity for people with disabilities, and the need for services in particular areas.

17 a. Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?

☐ Yes

☐ No

b. Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?

☐ Yes

☐ No

18 a. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?

☐ Yes

☐ No

b. Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?

☐ Yes

☐ No

c. Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing?

☐ Yes

☐ No

19 Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

☐ Yes

☐ No

The questions as they appear on the 2014 ACS paper questionnaire. Though a Census question about "disability" was introduced in 1880, the current questions originated on the 2006 ACS Content Test and were added to the ACS in 2008.

Examples of Federal Uses

- Required to identify vulnerable populations that may be at disproportionate risk of experiencing limitations in health care access, poor health quality, and suboptimal health outcomes.
- Required to report the housing needs of disabled persons. State and Local government grantees receiving formula block grant funds from the Community Development Block Grants, HOME Investment Partnership Program, Emergency Solutions Grant and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS programs, are required by law to report these needs.
- Used to review and analyze the unmet needs of people with developmental disabilities and to identify the characteristics of the target service population.
- Used to prepare and respond to disasters. Information about disability status, income, and plumbing facilities is used to estimate the size and nature of populations in a disaster-affected area and determine how best to respond to community needs.
- Used for transit service planning, where some geographic areas may need to be targeted for special public transportation service such as para-transit service.
- Used to enforce against discrimination in education and employment.

Examples of Other Uses

State and local agencies use these statistics to plan programs and services for the disabled population. Advocacy groups use this information to advocate for public policy that ensures the independence and inclusion of people with disabilities in society.