Health Status and Healthcare Access for People with Disabilities in Florida

Individuals living with disabilities account for approximately 20% of the population in Florida. In this brief, we assess demographics, access to health care, health status, and chronic illness for persons with disabilities (PWD).  

Health Care Access
Lack of health insurance constitutes a significant barrier to consistent access to quality care and preventive services.  

19.3% of persons with disabilities have no health insurance.  

Persons with disabilities have increased difficulty accessing healthcare services compared to persons without disabilities. Access barriers for persons with disabilities include:  
- Transportation to healthcare appointments  
- Design of healthcare provider’s office  
- Unfriendly or unhelpful attitudes toward persons with disabilities  
- Finding a doctor who understands the complicated nature of their health condition

Healthcare costs represent a significant barrier to care for persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities were more likely to report that they needed to see a doctor in the past 12 months, but were unable to because of cost.  

1/3 of persons with disabilities reported cost as a barrier to care.  

Health Status & Behaviors
Persons with disabilities rated their general health significantly lower than persons without disabilities (Figure 1).  

- 25.7% of persons with disabilities rated their health as fair, compared to only 8.8% of persons without disabilities.

General Health by Disability Status in Florida

Persons with disabilities report twice the prevalence of daily smoking compared to persons without disabilities. Additionally, a greater proportion of persons with disabilities report a history of smoking.  

- 19.1% of persons with disabilities smoke every day compared to 11.5% of persons without disabilities.

Among current smokers, a higher proportion of persons with disabilities tried to quit smoking for one day or more during the past year.  

- 68.7% of persons with disabilities stopped smoking for one day or longer in the past year, compared to 58.6% of persons without disabilities.

A lower proportion of persons with disabilities reported engaging in physical activity compared to persons without disabilities.  

- 38.6% of persons with disabilities reported “inactive” as their physical activity level compared to 19.6% of persons without disabilities.

A higher proportion of persons with disabilities reported being overweight or obese compared to persons without disabilities.

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1 Data from the 2008, 2009 and 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS)
• 65.8% of persons with disabilities are overweight or obese compared to 55.7% of persons without disabilities.

**Chronic Illness**

Persons with disabilities suffer from higher rates of chronic illness, such as diabetes and cancer (Figure 2).

- 19.6% of persons with disabilities have diabetes compared to 7.0% of persons without disabilities.
- 13.5% of persons with disabilities have cancer compared to 5.7% of persons without disabilities.

Persons with disabilities also have higher rates of high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

- Over half of persons with disabilities have high blood pressure and high cholesterol compared to 27.4% and 37.0% of persons without disabilities.

**Caregivers of PWD**

Caregivers provide thousands of hours of unpaid care to adults who have a disability or another health issue, serving an important role in the U.S. health care system.

- The majority (58%) of caregivers are women.
- The mean age of caregivers is 48 years.
- 59% of caregivers are employed.
- Caregivers are more likely to have a disability than non-caregivers (27% compared to 20%).
- Caregivers reported more days of poor mental health in the past month (5.7 days) than non-caregivers (3.3 days).
- 21% of caregivers needed to see a doctor but could not because of cost.

Providing care for an older adult has been linked to mental, physical, financial and work-related problems for caregivers (Figure 3).

**Demographics**

Persons with disabilities are disproportionately older. One-fourth of persons with disabilities are between the ages of 55 and 64. Nearly one-third of persons with disabilities are over the age of 65. Among those with a disability, 57.5% are female and 42.5% are male. 73.3% of persons with disabilities are White, 12.6% Hispanic, 8.2% African American, and 5.8% other or multiracial. Persons with disabilities have disproportionately lower levels of income and education. 20.6% of persons with disabilities make less than $15,000 a year, compared to 11% of persons without disabilities. 11.8% of persons with disabilities did not graduate high school compared to 8.2% of persons without disabilities. 29.1% of persons with disabilities report graduating from college or technical school compared to 35.9% of persons without disabilities. Persons with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed, unable to work, or retired compared to persons without disabilities. Nearly 20.0% of persons with disabilities are unable to work compared to only 1.1% of persons without disabilities.

**Key Recommendations**

- Include disability education in medical, nursing and other healthcare professions training
- Develop ways to engage persons with disabilities in all state and local health promotion activities
- Provide incentives to encourage healthcare providers to create physically accessible offices
- Educate the public about programs, services and training programs available to persons with disabilities and their caregivers
- Implement a fluid transition of care with increased education for providers, payers and caregivers.
- Expand family-centered supports and services

For more information and resources about persons with disabilities please visit our website: [http://fodh.phhp.ufl.edu/](http://fodh.phhp.ufl.edu/)