

MINNESOTANS WITH DISABILITIES

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

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This report provides a demographic and economic overview of people with disabilities in Minnesota, in order to better understand their experiences and needs. This data can help with planning efforts for health and educational services, assistive technology, hiring goals, greater inclusion, and economic security for Minnesotans with disabilities.



Definitions of Disability

There is no consensus on defining and measuring disability status. The data used in this report comes from the American Community Survey (ACS), a survey of households published annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. Since 2008, the ACS has utilized a definition of disability based upon the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health, a conceptual framework outlined by the World Health Organization in 2001. Research has suggested that this framework potentially undercounts the number of people with one or more disabilities, “especially those with psychiatric disabilities, communication disabilities, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and / or chronic illnesses, because it emphasizes functional difficulties rather than the prevalence of conditions or diagnoses¹.” Despite these potential shortcomings, the ACS is one of the leading sources of disability status in the United States and it has the benefit of allowing comparisons across small geographies.

Those who report any of these six difficulties are considered to “have a disability.” Due to this definition, not all persons with diseases or conditions that can be limiting may self-identify as having a disability if, in their perception, the condition is not creating any of these difficulties. As a final note on definitions and methodology, the ACS publishes disability data for the civilian, non-institutionalized population. Because those living in nursing homes, correctional facilities and other group settings are excluded from the survey, readers should be aware that the complete tally of Minnesotans with disabilities is likely higher than the following statistics indicate.

The framework for disability used by the ACS and throughout this report is based upon self-identified “difficulties” (hereafter referred to as “disabilities”) in six areas:



Hearing

Those who are deaf or who have serious difficulty hearing (asked of all persons)



Vision

Those who are blind or who have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses (asked of all persons)



Cognitive

Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, those who have difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions (asked of those age 5+)



Ambulatory

Those who have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs (asked of those age 5+)



Self-care

Those who have difficulty bathing or dressing (asked of those age 5+)

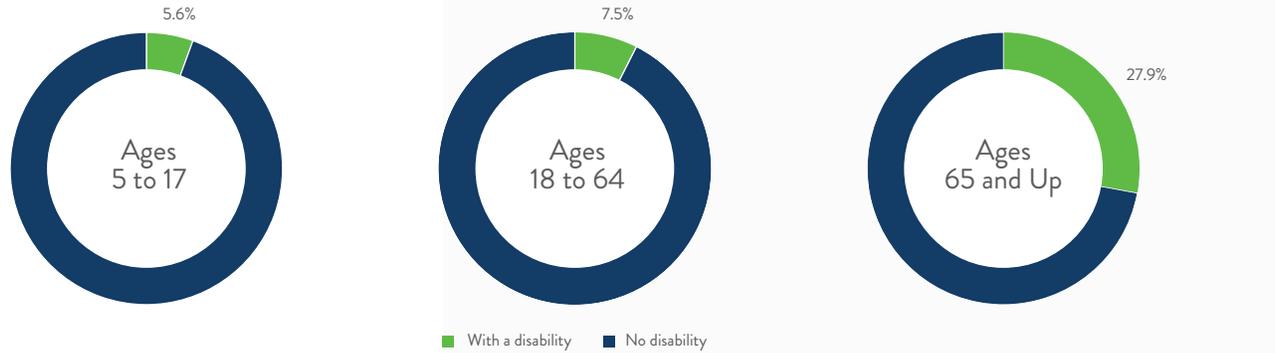


Independent living

Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, those who have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor’s office or shopping (asked of those age 18+)

¹See [Current Approaches to Measuring Disability Status in Federal Surveys May Limit Understanding of Economic and Health Disparities](#) (2024). For a further discussion of disability definitions and measurements used by the U.S. Census Bureau, see: <https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance.html>.

Figure 1. Share of Minnesotans with a Disability, by Age, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Sex by Age by Disability Status." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18101, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDTIY2023.B18101?q=tbl18101&g=040XX00US27>. Accessed on March 27, 2025.

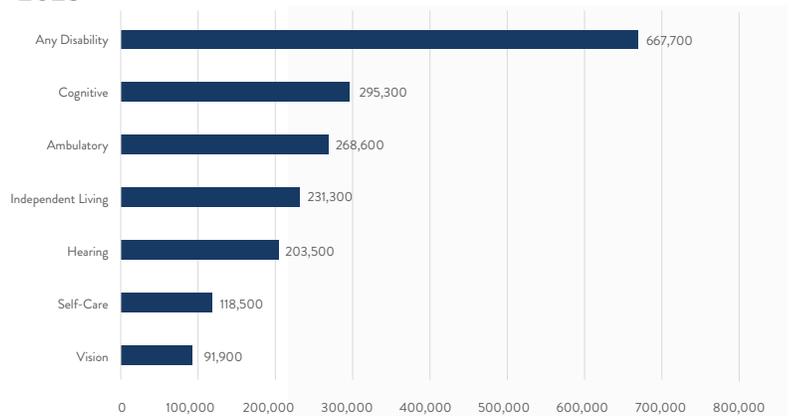
Prevalence of Disability

About 668,000 Minnesotans (11.5% of the state population) reported having one or more disabilities. Among those with any given disability, 45% (about 300,000 Minnesotans) reported having two or more disabilities. While some disabilities are present at birth, as Figure 1 illustrates, the likelihood of experiencing a disability also increases as one gets older. Males and females have very similar rates of disability. The overall disability rate for males is 11.9% (about 338,000) and 11.6% (about 330,000) for females.

Of the six disability types defined in the ACS, today more Minnesotans have a cognitive disability than any other type of disability. This is a recent development. While ambulatory disabilities have remained relatively constant since 2010, cognitive disabilities have increased by 44%.

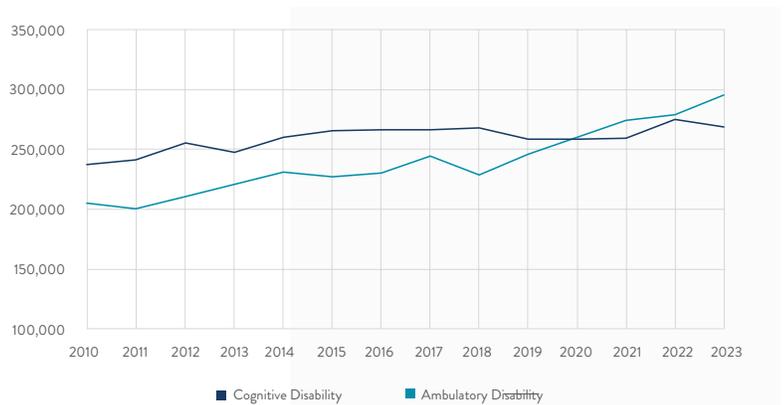
Among the child population ages 5-17, as well as the typical working-age population (ages 18-64), a cognitive disability is most common. However, the older adult population (age 65+) is more likely to report an ambulatory disability than any other type. This may be due to several factors, including difficulty responding to the survey due to the nature of the disability, a greater likelihood of living in an institutional setting later in life if experiencing a cognitive issue (thus not appearing in the data) and a reduced life expectancy among persons with certain cognitive impairments.

Figure 2. Minnesotans with a Disability, by Disability Type, 2023



Source: Totals here derived from Tables 18010-7 - see "disability by type and age" Excel file

Figure 3. Minnesotans with Cognitive and Ambulatory Disabilities, 2010 to 2023



Source: Tables C18014 and C18105

Geographic Differences in Disabilities

Across Minnesota’s 87 counties, the percentage of the population with a disability varies from 8.4% in Carver County (lowest) to 20.2% in Aitkin County (highest). Because disability is strongly associated with aging, counties with higher percentages of older adults tend to have higher percentages of residents reporting disabilities. In addition to Aitkin, Clearwater, Swift, Pine, Itasca and Koochiching all have an estimated disability prevalence greater than 17% of the civilian noninstitutionalized population. However, these six counties are not very populous and only account for about 21,000 (roughly 3%) of all Minnesotans with disabilities. For comparison, there are more than six times as many persons with disabilities (129,000) who live in Hennepin, Minnesota’s most populous county. Other highly populated counties are also home to large numbers of persons with disabilities, including Ramsey (about 66,000 people), Dakota (45,000), Anoka (36,000), St. Louis (30,000), Washington (26,000), Stearns (18,000), and Olmsted (16,000).



Figure 4. Minnesotans with a Disability, by Age and Disability Type, 2023

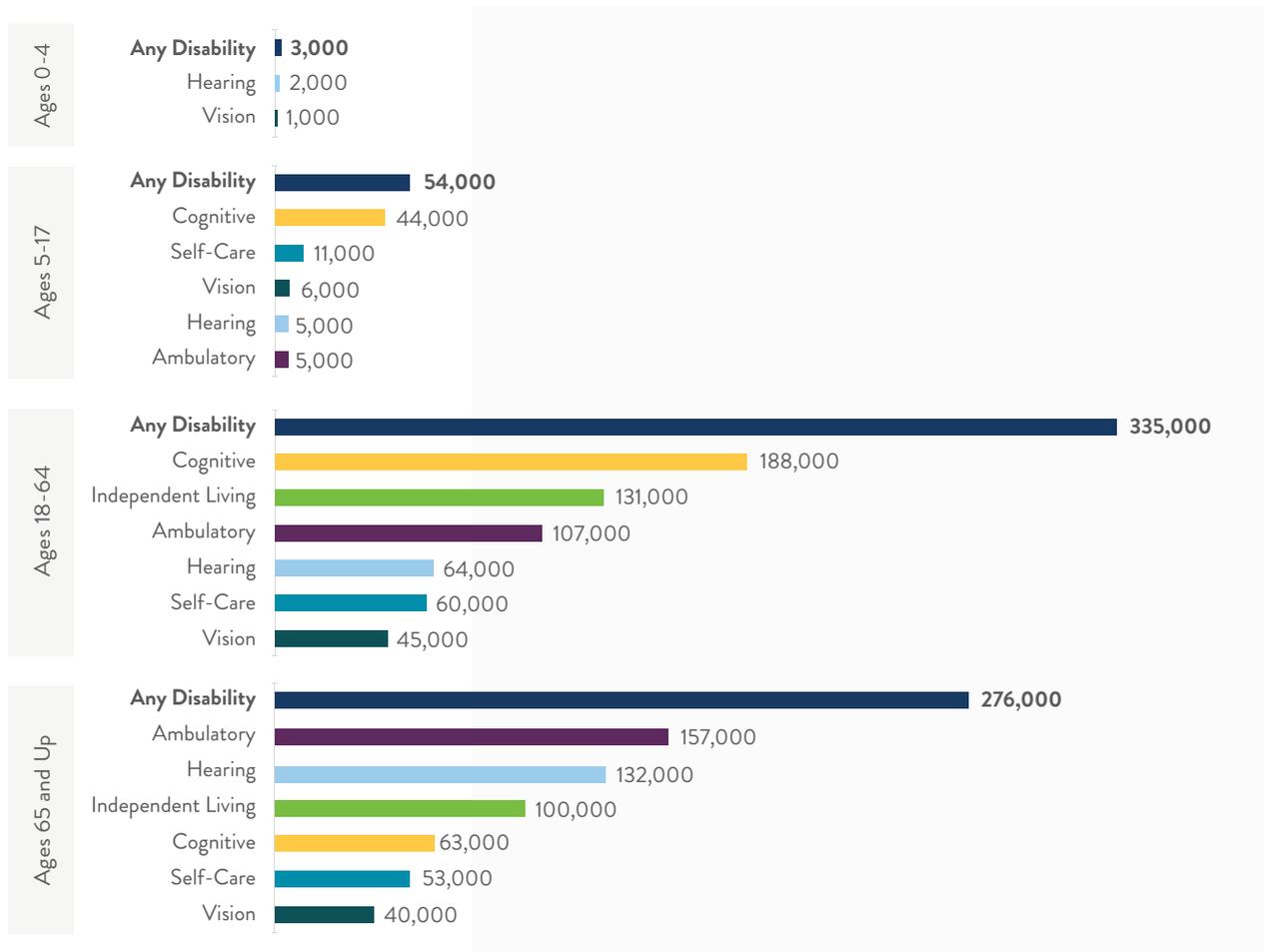
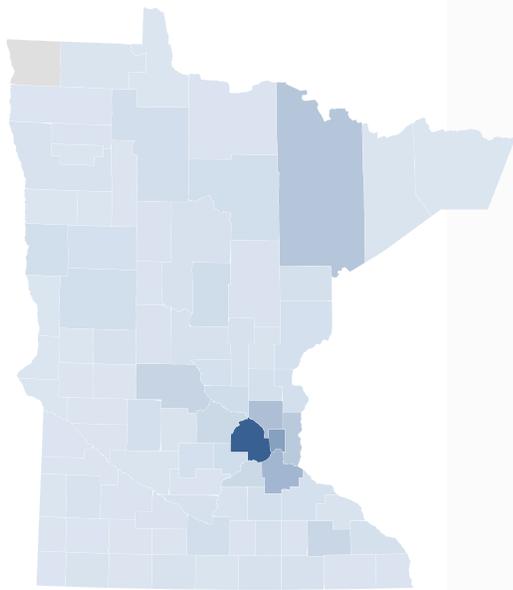
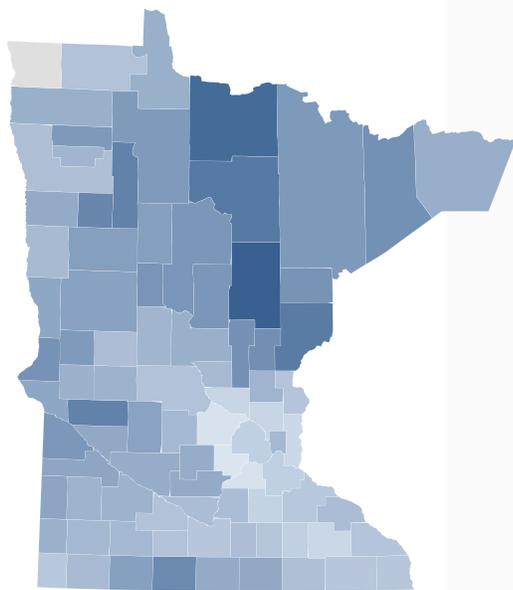


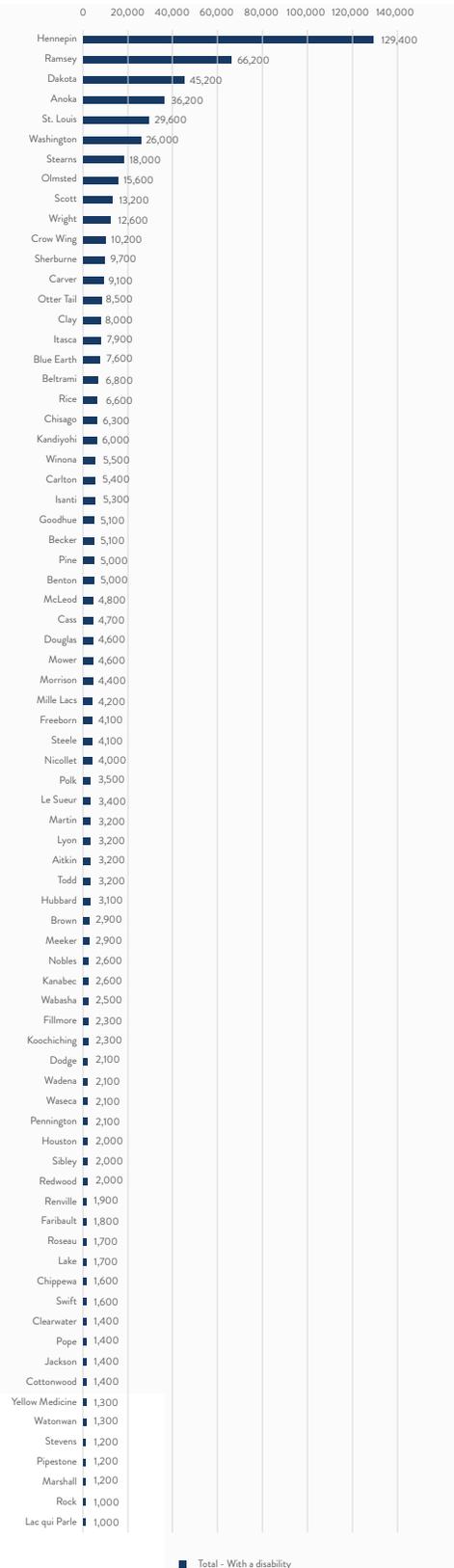
Figure 5 / Maps 1 & 2. Number of People with a Disability, by Counties with at Least 1,000 or More People with at Least One Disability (2019-2023)



of people with a disability
492 129,361



of people with a disability
8.40% 20.20%



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Sex by Age by Disability Status." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18101, 2023, [https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2023_B18101?q=B18101&q=040XX00US27\\$0500000&moe=false](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT5Y2023_B18101?q=B18101&q=040XX00US27$0500000&moe=false). Accessed on April 8, 2025.

Figure 6a. Number of People with at Least One Disability, by Cultural Group, 2019-2023
(age 18 to 64; margin of error shown at the 95% confidence level)

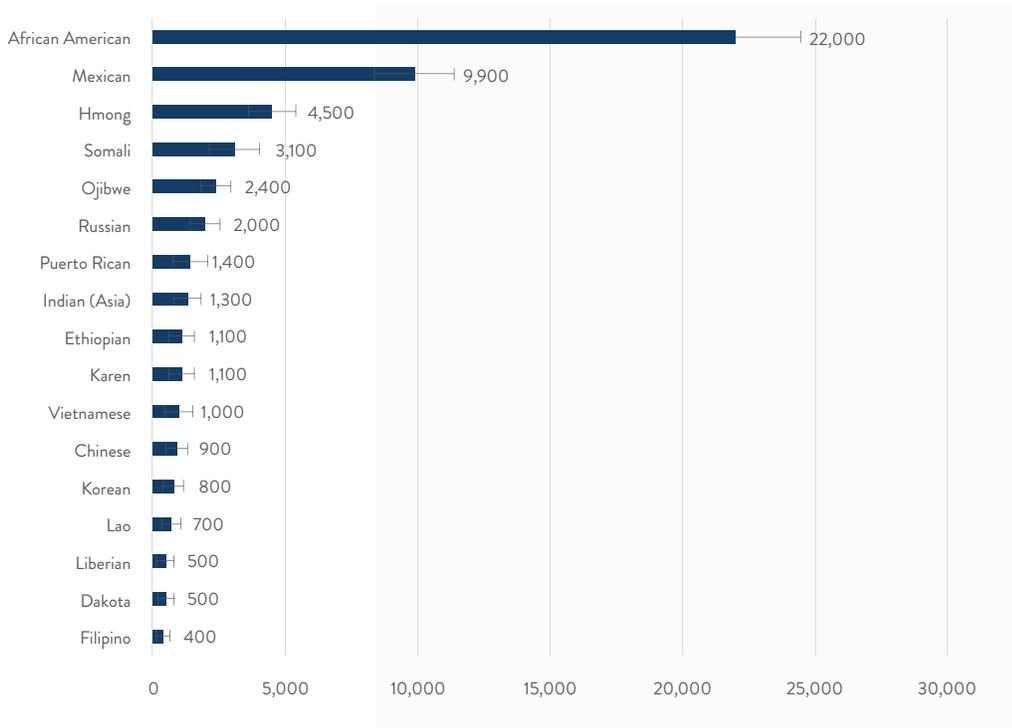


Figure 6b. Percent with at Least One Disability, by Cultural Group, 2019-2023
(age 18 to 44; margin of error shown at the 95% confidence level)

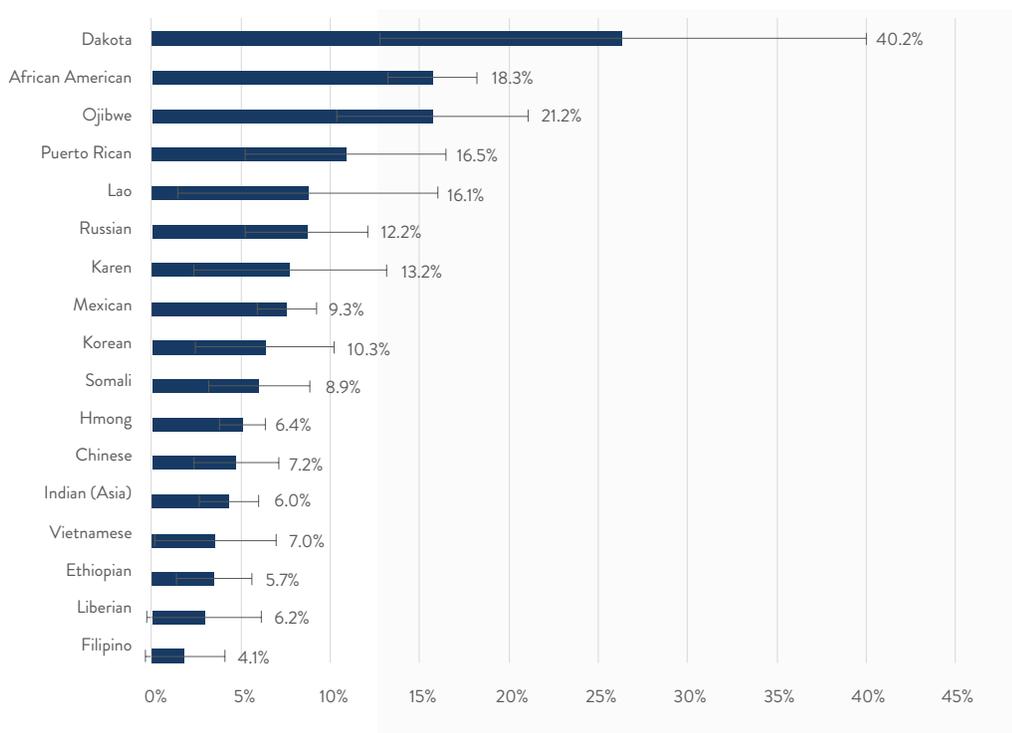
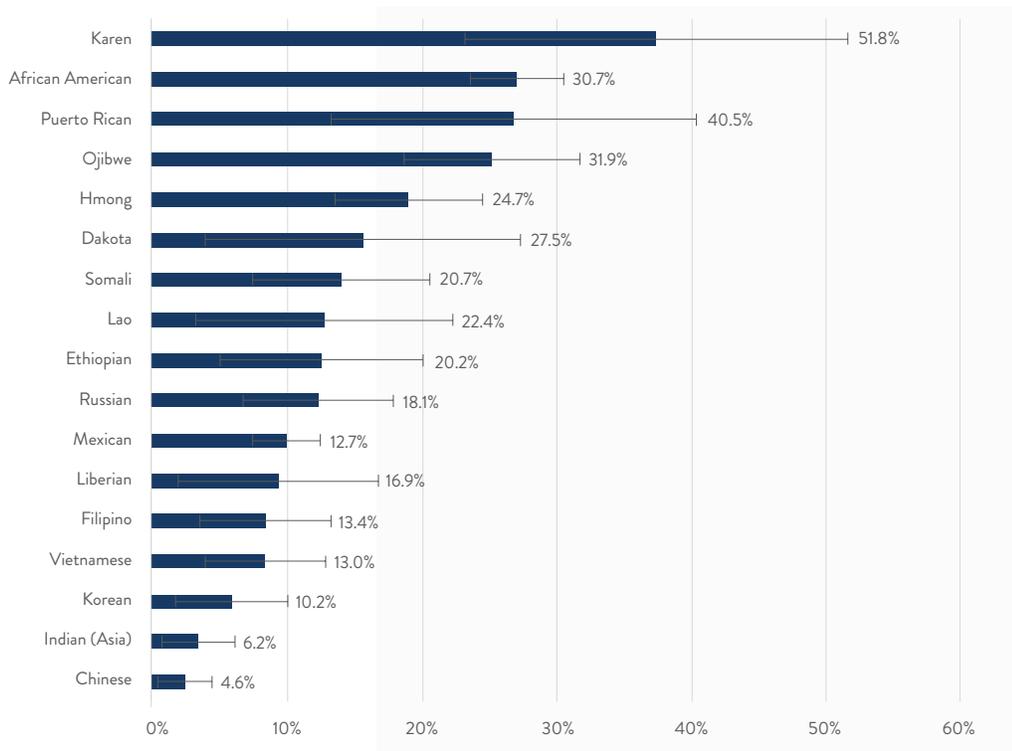


Figure 6c. Percent with at Least One Disability, by Cultural Group, 2019-2023 (age 45 to 64; margin of error shown at the 95% confidence level)



Work Status and Labor Force Participation Among Minnesotans with Disabilities

Many persons with disabilities face a challenging employment environment. Due to the nature of their disability, some individuals have constrained job prospects or an inability to work whatsoever. Others may experience hiring discrimination due to employers wrongly perceiving that they cannot perform a particular job. Some employers may hesitate to put necessary accommodations in place to support a worker with a disability. People with disabilities who have experienced repeated difficulty securing a job or limited prospects may drop out of the labor market, as other “discouraged workers” have done.

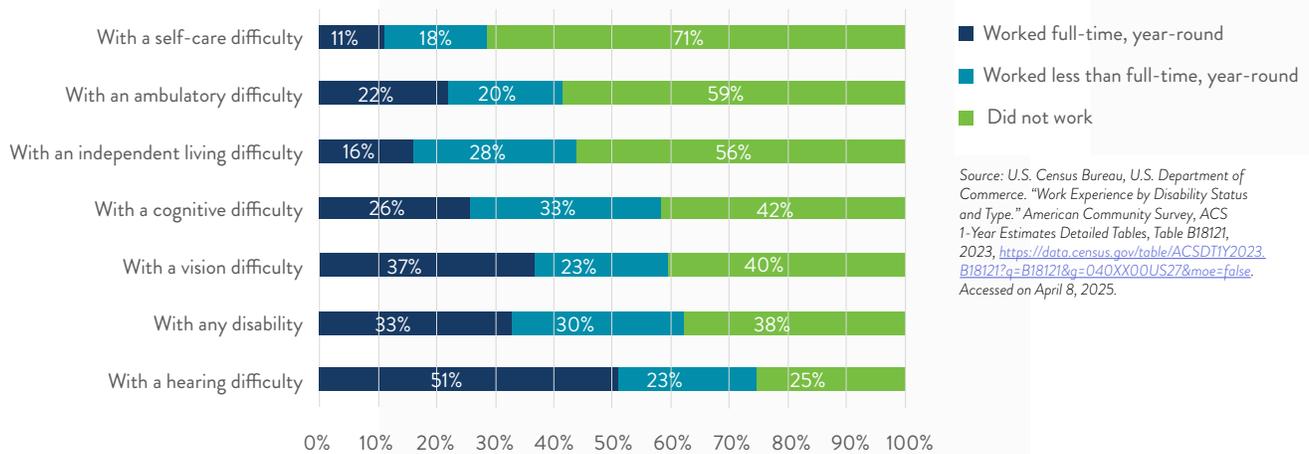


Among Minnesotans with disabilities who are of typical working ages (18-64), 38% did not work in 2023, while 62% did work. The latter group includes 33% who worked full-time and year-round, and another 30% who worked part-time and/or part-year. About 126,000 Minnesotans with disabilities did not work in 2023, while 99,000 worked part-time and/or part-year, and about 110,000 worked full-time, year-round.

Considerable variation in work status exists among persons experiencing different types of disabilities. Overall, 63% of Minnesotans with a disability worked either full or part-time in 2023. Minnesotans with a hearing disability had the highest percentage of having worked in the past year, (63%), while those with a self-care disability had the lowest (29%). Eleven percent of those with a self-care disability worked full-time, year-round, making them the group least likely to experience full-time employment.

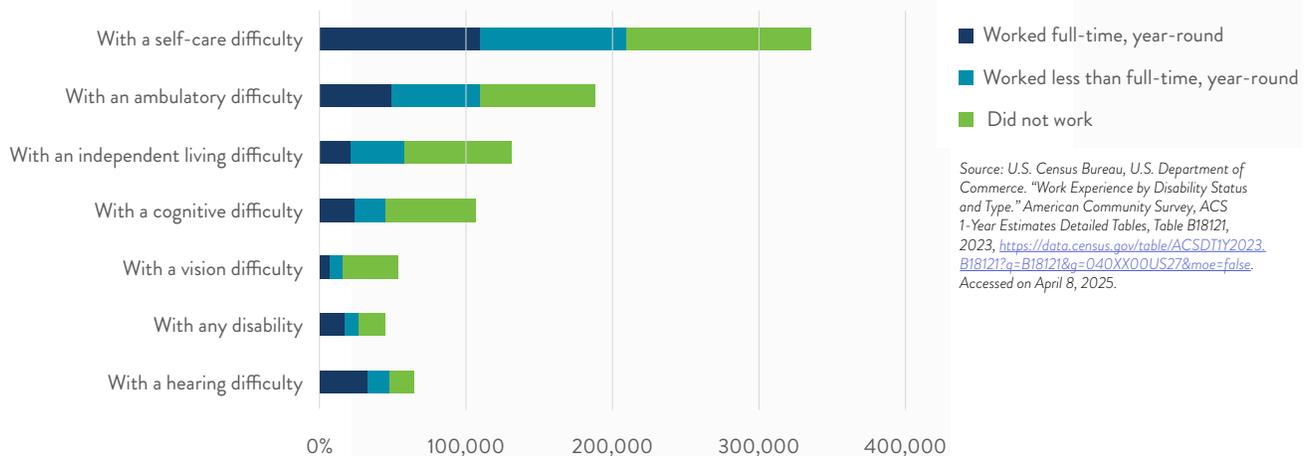


Figure 7. Work Status by Disability Type, Ages 18-64, 2023 (Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Work Experience by Disability Status and Type." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18121, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/tables/ACSDTIY2023/B18121?q=B18121&g=040XX00US27&moe=false>. Accessed on April 8, 2025.

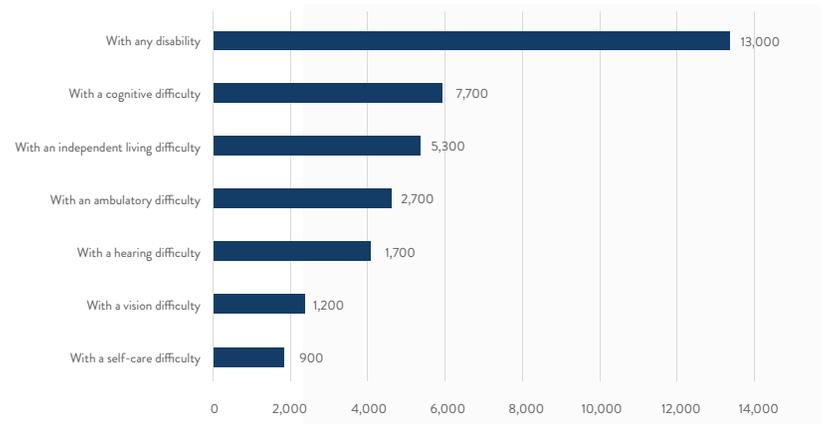
Figure 8. Work Status by Disability Type, Ages 18-64, 2023 (Numeric)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Work Experience by Disability Status and Type." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18121, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/tables/ACSDTIY2023/B18121?q=B18121&g=040XX00US27&moe=false>. Accessed on April 8, 2025.

The leading disability type among the unemployed is a cognitive disability (about 7,700 people), followed by an independent living disability (about 5,300 people), ambulatory disability (about 2,700 people), hearing disability (about 1,700 people), vision disability (about 1,200 people), and a self-care disability (about 900 people). Note: these numbers sum to more than the total due to people with multiple disability types appearing in more than one category. About 126,000 Minnesotans with at least one disability did not work in 2023. This figure includes those who were out of the labor market entirely as well as about 13,000 who were unemployed and actively seeking work (see below).

Figure 9. Number of Unemployed People with a Disability, Ages 18-64, by Disability Type, 2023

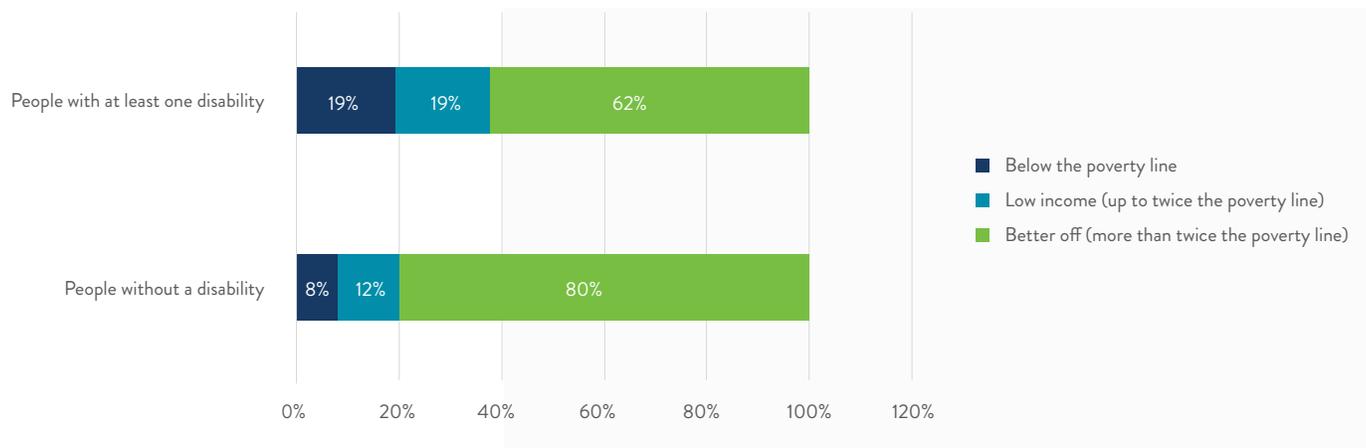


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status by Disability Status and Type." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18120, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDTIY2023.B18120?q=b18120&q=040XX00US27>. Accessed on April 10, 2025.

Economic Well-Being Among Minnesotans with Disabilities

As a group, employed people with a disability have lower earnings compared to employed able-bodied people. Among Minnesotans with disabilities age 16+ who had earnings from employment in 2023, median annual earnings were about \$32,000, while those without disabilities had significantly higher median earnings, about \$51,000. Some of these earnings differentials may be explained by differing levels of educational attainment, as greater education typically results in higher earnings. Among the age 25 or older population, 22% of Minnesotans with a disability had earned a bachelor's or higher degree in 2023, compared to 43% of the population without a disability. Additionally, 11% of adults with disabilities had not earned a high school diploma, compared to four percent of the able-bodied population.

Figure 10. Share in Poverty, by Disability Status, 2023



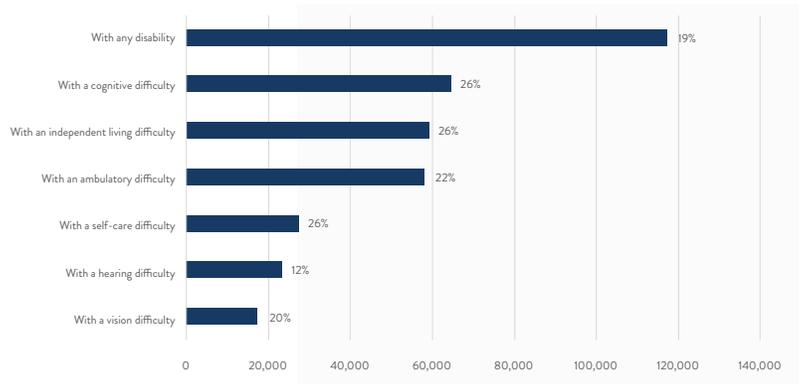
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Age by Ratio of Income to Poverty Level in the Past 12 Months by Disability Status and Type." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18131, 2023, <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDTIY2023.B18131?q=b18131&q=040XX00US27&moe=false>. Accessed on April 11, 2025.



The low earnings, or lack of earnings entirely, experienced by many adult Minnesotans with disabilities also result in higher poverty rates. Minnesotans with disabilities are more than two times as likely to live in poverty as those without a disability. About 19% of those with disabilities in the state live below the federal poverty line, compared to eight percent of the able-bodied population.

The share in poverty, however, differs considerably depending upon the type of disability experienced. Among Minnesota's disabled population age 5 and above, the poverty rate varies from a high of 26% for those with a cognitive disability, to a low of 12% for those with a hearing disability.

Figure 11. Minnesotans with Disabilities in Poverty (Age 18+), by Disability Type, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce. "Employment Status by Disability Status and Type." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables, Table B18120, 2023. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDTIY2023_B18120?q=b18120&q=040XX00US27. Accessed on April 10, 2025.

Of particular concern, Minnesotans experiencing cognitive disabilities have the highest poverty rate across all disability types and represent the largest group of disabled Minnesotans in poverty. Considering that those with cognitive disabilities also represent the largest share of the unemployed population with disabilities, it is clear that cognitive disabilities exact a high toll on individuals' economic well-being and that those with cognitive challenges may need additional consideration for employment and/or assistance programs.

Conclusion

People with disabilities make meaningful contributions to their families, workplaces, neighborhoods, and public life across Minnesota, but too often environments and communities are not structured to allow them full participation and opportunities for success. In 2025, about 11.5% of all Minnesotans reported having at least one disability, a figure that has been increasing across recent decades. Continued growth in the number and percentage of Minnesotans with disabilities is anticipated, given the overall aging of our state's population and rising disability prevalence later in life. Local communities, employers, nonprofits, and transportation and housing service providers will all need to be more responsive to the increasing number of Minnesotans with a disability. With greater attention to the challenges that people with disabilities and their families face, Minnesota can advance economic security, community inclusion, and sense of overall well-being for its current and future residents with disabilities.