

## A Profile of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities in Massachusetts

This brief provides a profile of working-age (25-61) adults living in Massachusetts in 2008. Disability prevalence is described, and employment, income and poverty statistics are provided. For comparison, employment, income and poverty statistics are also provided for working-age adults without disabilities.

**Prevalence:** Nearly 1 in 10 working-age persons in the Commonwealth reported having a disability. Table 1 includes the estimated prevalence of any disability and the estimated prevalence of visual impairment, hearing impairment, physical impairment, cognitive impairment, activity of daily living limitation and independent living

limitation among working-age persons. The table also includes estimates of the number of working-age persons with disabilities and the number of persons with each type of impairment or limitation.

**Employment:** Compared to persons without disabilities, a smaller percentage

**Table 1:** Estimated Prevalence of Disabilities Among Working-Age Persons and Estimated Number of Working-Age Persons with Disabilities in Massachusetts

Impairment or Limitation	Prevalence (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Number of Persons	Margin of Error (persons)
Any Disability	8.8	0.33	291,600	11,230
Visual Impairment	1.6	0.15	52,800	4,800
Hearing Impairment	1.8	0.16	60,700	5,200
Physical Impairment	4.1	0.23	135,000	7,730
Cognitive Impairment	4.0	0.23	132,700	7,670
Activity of Daily Living Limitation	1.3	0.13	43,800	4,440
Independent Living Limitation	3.0	0.20	98,100	6,610

**Source:** 2008 American Community Survey **Note:** The margin of error corresponds to 90 percent confidence limits.

Work Without Limits is a public/private partnership that brings together people with disabilities, family members, policy researchers, policy makers, service planners, employment service providers, employers, and other stakeholders to maximize work opportunities for youth and adults with disabilities, address the needs of employers, and strengthen the Massachusetts workforce.

## Where does the data come from?

The data comes from the 2008 American Community Survey. The American Community Survey is a national survey conducted in every state by the U.S. Census Bureau. The statistics in this brief are based on the survey responses of approximately 19,000 Massachusetts households that include approximately 32,000 Massachusetts residents.

## How is disability defined?

A person is considered to have a disability if he or she answers 'yes' to any of the following survey questions:

1. Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing? (Hearing Impairment)
2. Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses? (Visual Impairment)
3. Because of a physical, mental or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions? (Cognitive Impairment)
4. Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs? (Physical Impairment)
5. Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing? (Activity of Daily Living Limitation)
6. 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? (Independent Living Impairment)

of persons with disabilities were employed. Approximately 42.8 ( $\pm$  2.0) percent of working-age persons with disabilities reported being employed in the week prior to the survey compared to 84.7 ( $\pm$  0.44) percent of persons without disabilities.<sup>1</sup> Also, the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities was higher than the unemployment rate among persons without disabilities. In 2008, the unemployment rate among working-age persons with disabilities was 10.7 ( $\pm$  1.2) percent compared to 4.3 ( $\pm$  0.25) percent for working-age persons without disabilities. Finally, among persons who report working in the prior year, a smaller percentage of working-age persons with disabilities worked full-time for the full year compared to persons without disabilities. Among persons with disabilities who worked in the prior year,

## What time period is covered?

The surveys were completed in 2008. The disability statistics and most employment statistics cover 2008. The income statistics and full year/full-time employment statistic include the 12 months prior to the survey completion and cover 2007 through November 2008. The income amounts are inflation-adjusted to represent 2008 dollar amounts.

## Are any persons excluded?

Persons living in correctional facilities, juvenile facilities, nursing facilities, residential or inpatient health care facilities, college student housing and military quarters are excluded.

approximately 27.1 ( $\pm$  1.8) worked full-time for the full year compared to 64.0 ( $\pm$  0.59) percent of working-age persons without disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

**Income:** Whether income is measured as a person's earnings from work, a person's total earned and unearned income, or total household income, the income of persons with disabilities was much lower than the income of persons without disabilities. A smaller percentage of persons with disabilities had earnings from work compared to persons without disabilities. Approximately 49.3 ( $\pm$  2.0) percent of working-age persons with disabilities reported earned income in the prior 12 months compared to 89.7 ( $\pm$  0.37) percent of working-age persons without disabilities. For those reporting earnings from work, the median annual earnings was \$27,500 ( $\pm$  \$3,060) for persons with disabilities compared to \$44,500 ( $\pm$  \$1,320) for persons without disabilities.

The total income of persons with disabilities (earned and unearned) is also lower. The median total annual income of working-age persons with disabilities was \$13,400 ( $\pm$  \$1,270) compared to a median income of \$40,800 ( $\pm$  \$960) for working-age persons without disabilities.<sup>3</sup> There is also a disparity in household income. The median household income for households that include working-age persons with disabilities is \$44,500 ( $\pm$  \$3,770). This compares to a median income of \$81,500 ( $\pm$  \$1,010) for households that include at least one working-age adult and none of the working-age adults in the household report having a disability.

## How is the Unemployment Rate Defined?

A non-working person is considered unemployed if he or she is available for work in the week prior to the survey and either actively sought work in the four weeks prior to the survey or was waiting to be called back to a job after a layoff. A person is considered employed if he or she worked for pay at a job or business in the week prior to the survey. The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed persons divided by the total number of unemployed and employed persons.

## How is Poverty Defined?

A family's poverty status is determined by comparing the family income to the 'poverty guideline'. The poverty guideline is an annual income amount determined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 2008, the poverty guideline for a family of four was \$21,200. If the family income is less than the poverty guideline, the family is considered to be living in poverty. If the family is living in poverty, all persons in the family are also in poverty.

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**Poverty:** The poverty rate among working-age persons with disabilities is very high, with approximately 1 out of every 4 persons ( $25.0 \pm 2.4$  percent) living in poverty. The poverty rate among working-age persons without disabilities is much lower with approximately 1 out of every 20 persons ( $5.7 \pm 0.4$  percent) living in poverty.

The poverty rate is lower for persons who are working compared to those who are not working. Among working-age persons with disabilities who worked in the week prior to the survey, the poverty rate was  $7.8 (\pm 2.3)$  percent compared to  $37.6 (\pm 3.5)$  percent among working-age persons with disabilities who did not work. Comparably, the poverty rate among working-age persons without disabilities who worked in the prior week was  $2.8 (\pm 0.3)$  percent compared to  $21.5 (\pm 1.8)$  percent among working-age persons without disabilities who did not work.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The margin of error for percentages corresponds to 90 percent confidence limits.

<sup>2</sup>The full year is at least 50 weeks. Full-time is 35 hours per week or more.

<sup>3</sup>The margin of error for medians corresponds to 90 percent confidence limits.



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### Additional Information

The Census Bureau web site contains additional information on the American Community Survey: [www.census.gov/acs/www/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/).

The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics (StatsRRTC) [www.disabilitystatistics.org](http://www.disabilitystatistics.org) is a source of additional disability statistics.

For further information on this issue brief or to access it in an alternative format, contact Jack Gettens at 508-856-4334 or [jack.gettens@umassmed.edu](mailto:jack.gettens@umassmed.edu).



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**WorkWithoutLimits**  
Putting abilities to work in Massachusetts.

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