

# Disability Statistics Abstract

Number 9

## Health Status, Medical Care Use, and Number of Disabling Conditions in the United States

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**A**pproximately 37.7 million people, or 15 percent of the noninstitutionalized United States population, have disabilities, defined here as a limitation in activity caused by a chronic condition or impairment.<sup>1</sup> More than one-third of this group has two or more disabling conditions. People with multiple disabling conditions have poorer health and use more medical services than those with only one condition.

All estimates presented in this report are based on the 1992 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).<sup>2</sup>

### Age and Number of Disabling Conditions

The overall rate of disability increases with age, from 6 percent of children and youth to 45 percent of adults aged 75 and older (table 1). The proportion of individuals with activity limitation who have

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### One out of three persons with activity limitation has multiple disabling conditions.

multiple disabling conditions also rises sharply with age. One in six children and youth with disabilities has more than one condition, compared to half of those aged 65 and over.

### Restricted Activity

Individuals with disabilities have, on average, two months of restricted activity days per year, spending 25 days of that time in bed. For those with two or more conditions, the number of restricted activity days climbs to an average of three months per year, with nearly six weeks spent in bed. Restricted activity and bed-disability days increase with age. Persons 75 years old and over with one condition have 8 weeks of restricted activity days compared with 15 weeks for those with multiple disabling conditions.

### Medical Services Use

Individuals with disabilities see a doctor an average of 14 times in a

year; this also increases with age, rising from 10 visits for children and youth under 18 to 17 visits for those aged 75 and over. Those with two or more disabling conditions have almost twice as many visits as those with one condition (19 vs. 11 visits).

People with disabilities have 31 hospital discharges per 100 persons per year. As with physician visits, there is a steady rise in frequency of hospitalization with age and number of conditions. People aged 75 or over with multiple disabling conditions have nearly 50 hospital discharges per 100 persons per year. However, the average length of hospital stay is fairly constant, between seven and nine days, across both age and condition groups (data not shown).

### Self-Reported Health Status

Overall, more than two out of five people with disabling conditions rate their health as fair or

People with multiple disabling conditions report twice as many restricted activity days as those with only one condition.

**TABLE 1. Health Status and Medical Care Use of Persons with Chronic Conditions Causing Limitation in Activity, by Age and Number of Conditions: 1992**

Disability or health measure	Total	Under 18	Age			
			18-44	45-64	65-74	75 +
Limited in activity (in thousands)*	37,733	4,047	10,681	11,064	6,362	5,578
One condition	23,583	3,354	7,905	6,325	3,254	2,744
Two or more conditions	14,150	693	2,776	4,738	3,108	2,834
Limited in activity (percent)	15.0	6.1	10.1	22.8	34.4	45.3
One condition	9.4	5.0	7.5	13.0	17.6	22.3
Two or more conditions	5.6	1.0	2.6	9.8	16.8	23.0
Restricted activity days (per person)	62.6	26.8	58.1	69.1	66.7	79.8
One condition	45.1	24.5	47.6	48.0	46.0	55.0
Two or more conditions	91.9	38.2	88.0	97.3	88.2	103.9
Bed-disability days (per person)	24.8	12.0	20.9	26.3	26.5	36.5
One condition	15.8	10.6	15.4	15.8	13.9	25.8
Two or more conditions	39.7	19.0	36.4	40.3	39.7	46.8
Physician visits (per person)	14.0	9.6	13.5	14.6	14.5	16.5
One condition	11.2	8.4	11.7	11.4	12.2	11.3
Two or more conditions	18.8	15.3	18.7	18.9	16.9	21.6
Hospital discharges (per 100 persons)	30.5	20.5	22.7	31.5	38.5	41.9
One condition	24.4	18.8	19.3	24.5	33.0	35.9
Two or more conditions	40.7	28.6	32.4	40.9	44.2	47.7
Feeling poor or fair (percent)	43.8	18.2	34.2	52.2	53.3	53.0
One condition	32.2	15.8	27.4	37.9	40.8	42.1
Two or more conditions	63.2	29.7	53.7	71.3	66.3	63.6

\* Totals may not add due to rounding.

Source: 1992 National Health Interview Survey

poor. While the frequency of fair or poor health increases with both age and number of conditions, the disparity between those with one condition and those with multiple conditions narrows with age.

### Comparisons by Gender and Race

Women have slightly higher rates of disability and multiple disabling conditions than men (table 2). Women with disabilities have more restricted activity days and more bed-disability days than men, but the differences due to

number of conditions are greater than the differences associated with gender. This distinction is particularly apparent in adults aged 18 and over (figure 1). Women have more physician visits than men, but are hospitalized somewhat less frequently (table 2).

Blacks have a higher rate of multiple disabling conditions, a greater likelihood of rating their health fair or poor, and a higher average number of bed-disability days than whites. However, in all measures of health status and medical services use, the differences

associated with number of disabling conditions exceed those associated with race.

In summary, persons with chronic conditions or impairments that limit activity have high medical care usage. Within this group, those with multiple disabling conditions are even higher users of the health care system. These data underscore the need for health care providers and researchers to focus on the prevention of secondary or multiple conditions.

**TABLE 2. Health Status and Medical Care Use of Persons with Chronic Conditions Causing Limitation in Activity, by Gender, Race, and Number of Conditions: 1992.**

Disability or health measure	Gender		Race ‡	
	Male	Female	White	Black
Limited in activity (in thousands)*	17,783	19,950	31,693	5,008
One condition	11,543	12,039	20,082	2,862
Two or more conditions	6,240	7,910	11,611	2,146
Limited in activity (percent)	14.6	15.4	15.1	15.9
One condition	9.4	9.3	9.6	9.1
Two or more conditions	5.1	6.1	5.5	6.8
Restricted activity days (per person)	57.2	67.4	61.2	71.8
One condition	40.5	49.4	44.9	48.2
Two or more conditions	88.1	94.9	89.4	103.2
Bed-disability days (per person)	22.4	26.9	23.6	31.4
One condition	14.0	17.6	15.1	20.8
Two or more conditions	37.9	41.1	38.4	45.5
Physician visits (per person)	12.7	15.2	13.8	15.0
One condition	10.1	12.1	11.3	11.1
Two or more conditions	17.5	19.8	18.2	20.2
Hospital discharges (per 100 persons)	31.9	29.4	30.6	30.3
One condition	25.3	23.6	24.6	23.7
Two or more conditions	44.0	38.1	40.9	39.1
Feeling poor or fair (percent)	42.6	44.9	41.8	55.8
One condition	31.6	32.7	30.7	42.1
Two or more conditions	62.8	63.5	61.0	74.1

\* Totals may not add due to rounding.

‡ Excludes races other than white and black.

Source: 1992 National Health Interview Survey

**FIGURE 1. Restricted Activity Days for Persons with Chronic Conditions Causing Limitation**



