

Alaskans with Disabilities

A look at disability data from the U.S. Census Bureau

By **EDDIE HUNSINGER**

Eleven percent of Alaska’s population and 12 percent of the nation’s have a disability, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The most common type is difficulty walking or climbing stairs, which affects about 48 percent of Alaskans with a disability. (See Exhibit 1.)

The other types are hearing (37 percent), vision (18 percent) and cognitive (35 percent). And of the 76,302 Alaskans with a disability, 33,360 have more than one.

“Disability” covers a range of conditions and varies according to context. To measure disability with the American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau uses six questions to determine the type of difficulty: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and living independently. (See the sidebar at the end of this article for more information.)

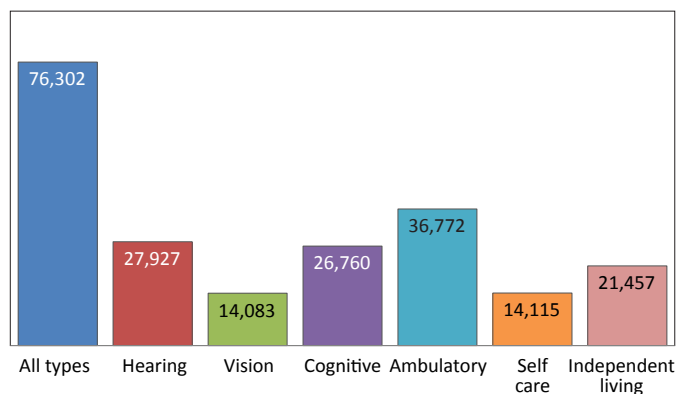
Age an important factor

As with many health and socioeconomic characteristics, age is an important factor in overall disability. It’s more common among seniors, with more than 30 percent of Alaskans between 65 and 74 having a disability and nearly 60 percent for those over age 75. (See Exhibit 2.)

Although people who are 65 and older make up just 9

1 Disabilities by Type

ALASKA, 2010 TO 2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 to 2014 American Community Survey

percent of Alaska’s population, they represent 32 percent of all Alaskans with disabilities. The senior population is projected to nearly double over the next 25 years, and as Alaska ages, the overall rate of disability is expected to increase.

Among Alaskan children, 5,765 have a disability, according to the 2010 to 2014 American Community Survey. Of those, 577 are children between newborn and 4 years who have difficulty seeing or hearing. Seeing and hearing disabilities are the only types the ACS tracks for children younger than 5.

Disabilities are slightly more common among males, at 11 percent, than among females, at 10 percent.

Higher in older areas

The importance of age structure is also reflected in regional disability rates. The Gulf Coast and Southeast regions, which have higher median ages and larger shares of the population 65 and older, also have higher disability rates. (See Exhibit 3.) The regions with particularly young populations — Northern and Southwest — have slightly lower rates.

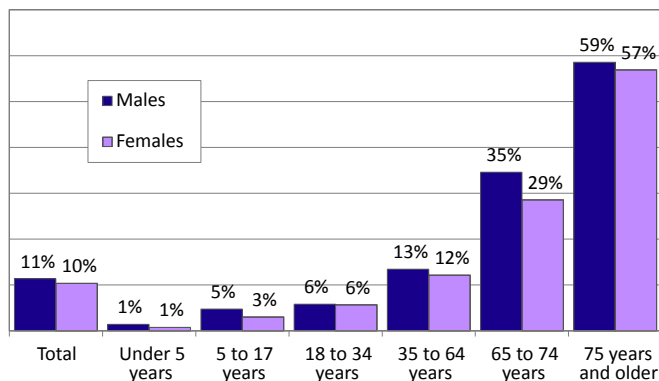
Still, in terms of numbers, most Alaskans with disabilities live in the state's population centers. Anchorage was home to 28,357 people with disabilities, followed by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (10,539), Fairbanks North Star Borough (9,669), and Kenai Peninsula Borough (8,122).

Higher rates for Natives, veterans

Even though the Alaska Native population is younger than the total population — with median ages of 28.7 and 33.3 years, respectively — disabilities are more common among Alaska Natives, at 14 percent. Of those, 8 percent are under age 18, 59 percent are in

2 Disabilities by Age and Sex

ALASKA, 2010 TO 2014



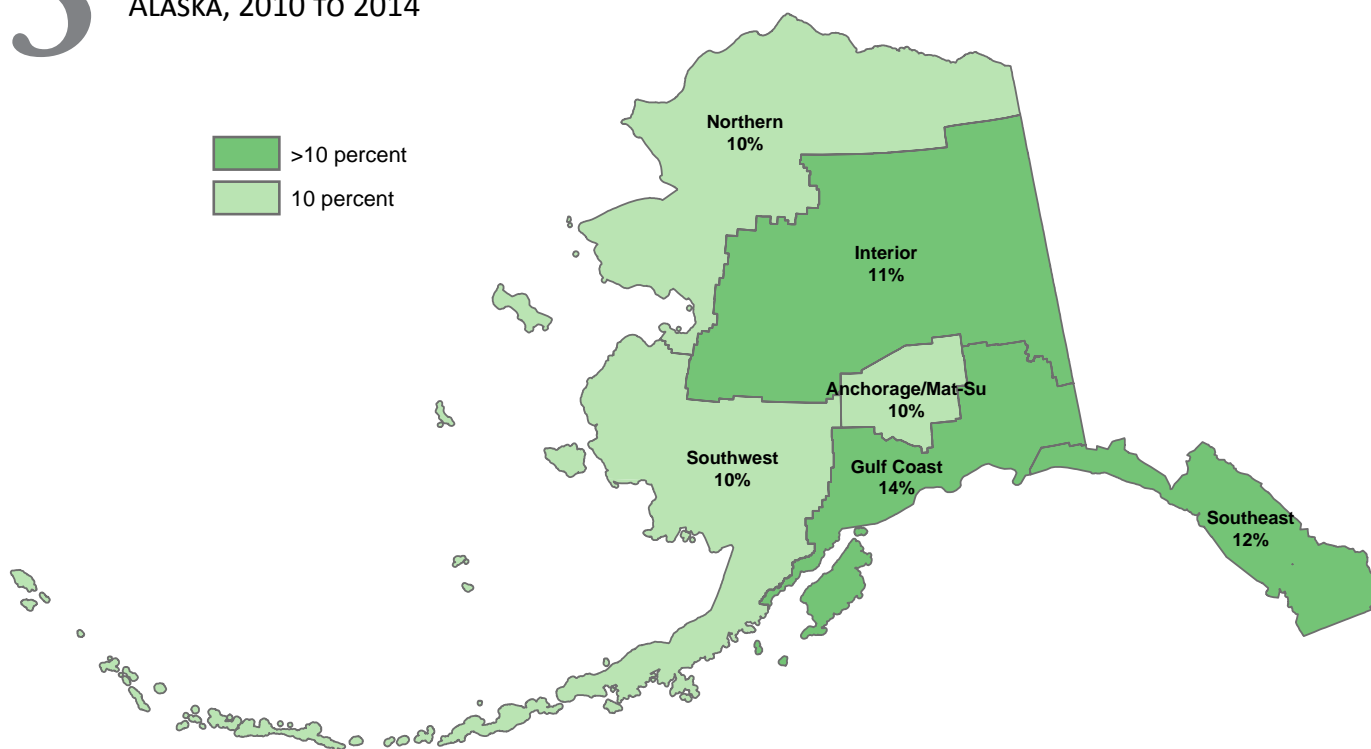
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 to 2014 American Community Survey

the working age range of 18 to 64, and 33 percent are seniors.

Veterans are another group whose rates stand out in the data. The survey shows 22 percent have a disability, versus 14 percent of the total adult population. Among senior citizens, 42 percent of veterans have a disability compared to 40 percent of all seniors.

3 Percent With a Disability by Region

ALASKA, 2010 TO 2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 to 2014

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Occupations and Industries Among Those With Disabilities

ALASKA, 2010 TO 2014

| | Total | | With a Disability | |
|--|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| | Estimate | Margin of Error | Estimate | Margin of Error |
| Employed Population Age 16 and Older | 347,715 | +/-2,362 | 22,687 | +/-983 |
| OCCUPATION | | | | |
| Management, business, science, and arts occupations | 36% | +/-0.6 | 31% | +/-2.4 |
| Service occupations | 18% | +/-0.5 | 18% | +/-1.9 |
| Sales and office occupations | 23% | +/-0.5 | 24% | +/-2.1 |
| Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations | 12% | +/-0.4 | 12% | +/-1.2 |
| Production, transportation, and material moving occupations | 11% | +/-0.4 | 14% | +/-1.5 |
| INDUSTRY | | | | |
| Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining | 6% | +/-0.3 | 5% | +/-0.9 |
| Construction | 8% | +/-0.4 | 7% | +/-1.0 |
| Manufacturing | 4% | +/-0.2 | 3% | +/-0.7 |
| Wholesale trade | 2% | +/-0.2 | 1% | +/-0.4 |
| Retail trade | 11% | +/-0.4 | 14% | +/-2.0 |
| Transportation and warehousing, and utilities | 8% | +/-0.3 | 11% | +/-1.3 |
| Information | 2% | +/-0.2 | 2% | +/-0.6 |
| Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing | 4% | +/-0.3 | 3% | +/-0.7 |
| Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste mgmt services | 8% | +/-0.4 | 9% | +/-1.5 |
| Educational services, and health care and social assistance | 23% | +/-0.5 | 20% | +/-2.0 |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services | 9% | +/-0.4 | 8% | +/-1.3 |
| Other services (except public administration) | 4% | +/-0.3 | 4% | +/-0.9 |
| Public administration | 12% | +/-0.4 | 13% | +/-1.5 |

Note: Civilian noninstitutionalized population only

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 to 2014 American Community Survey

Employment lower, but jobs similar

Narrowing the state's population down to the typical working ages of 20 to 64 shows 42 percent of Alaskans with a disability are employed. In the total population between those ages, it's 71 percent.

Roughly half were outside the labor force, meaning they were neither working nor looking for work, compared to just 20 percent overall.

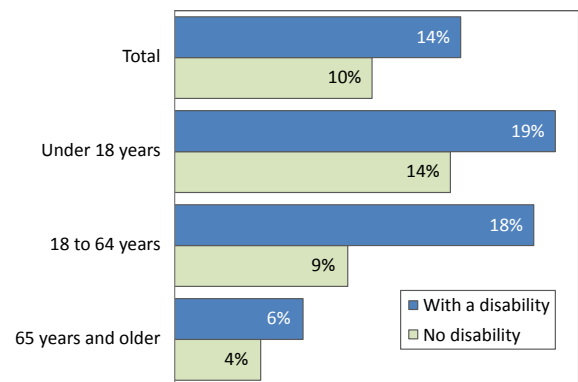
For those who were working, though, their typical occupations mirrored those of workers overall. (See Exhibit 4.) Among the 22,687 employed workers with a disability, the leading occupational group was management, business, science, and arts (31 percent, compared to 36 percent for all workers), followed by sales and office occupations (24 percent versus 23 percent), and service occupations (18 percent for both).

The industry makeup is also about the same. The leading industry group was educational services, and health care and social assistance (20 percent, compared to 23 percent for all workers), followed by public administration (13 percent versus 12 percent), and retail trade (14 percent versus 11 percent).

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Percent Below Poverty

BY AGE AND DISABILITY, 2010 TO 2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 to 2014 American Community Survey

Income lower, poverty higher

Though the typical industries and occupations were similar, earnings differed. Alaskans with a disability earned a median of \$30,000 per year from 2010 to 2014, and it was more than \$36,000 for all workers.

Poverty was also higher for those with disabilities, at a rate of 14 percent versus 10 percent for all Alaskans. (See Exhibit 5.) Specifically, 19 percent of children with a disability were in poverty, versus 14 percent of all children. For those 65 and older, it was 6 percent and 4 percent, respectively.

Eighty-five percent of Alaskans without a disability had incomes at least 150 percent of the poverty threshold, and it was 72 percent for those with disabilities.

More walk to work, and more single-person households

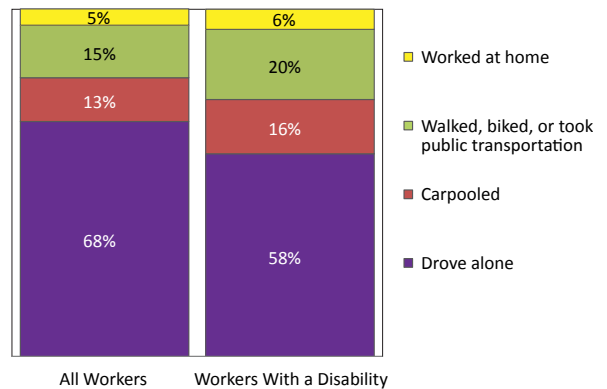
While nearly 70 percent of Alaska workers drive alone to work, it's just 58 percent among those with a disability. (See Exhibit 6.) Rates of commuting by carpooling, walking, biking, and public transportation as well as working from home were all a bit higher for workers with a disability.

In terms of living arrangements, 16 percent aged 15 to 64 with disabilities lived alone: significantly higher than the 9 percent for all Alaskans of those ages. Among

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Commuting and Disabilities

ALASKA, 2010 TO 2014



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 to 2014 American Community Survey

senior citizens, 27 percent with a disability lived alone versus 25 percent overall.

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About the data

There are several sources for state and local data on disability, including the American Community Survey, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, the Current Population Survey, and the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Data will differ between sources. The data this article uses are all from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

From the U.S. Census Bureau:

"The Census Bureau collects data on disability primarily through the American Community Survey (ACS) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). The definitions of disability are not always alike so caution should be taken when making comparisons across surveys. Generally, the SIPP estimates of disability prevalence are broader and encompass a greater number of activities on which disability status is assessed. The ACS has a more narrow definition but is capable of producing estimates for states, counties, and metropolitan areas. Because the ACS has replaced the decennial long-form as the source for small area statistics, there is no disability data in the 2010 Census.

"In addition to these recent data sources, the Census Bureau has also produced disability estimates from the 2000 Census, and the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC). Other federal agencies also collect and report disability statistics. Depending on your needs, one survey may be more suitable than another."

More information is available from U.S. Census Bureau at www.census.gov/people/disability/.

Person 1 (continued)

16 Is this person CURRENTLY covered by any of the following types of health insurance or health coverage plans? Mark "Yes" or "No" for EACH type of coverage in items a - h.

| | Yes | No |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Insurance through a current or former employer or union (of this person or another family member) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Insurance purchased directly from an insurance company (by this person or another family member) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Medicare, for people 65 and older, or people with certain disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Medicaid, Medical Assistance, or any kind of government-assistance plan for those with low incomes or a disability | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. TRICARE or other military health care | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. VA (including those who have ever used or enrolled for VA health care) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Indian Health Service | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. Any other type of health insurance or health coverage plan - Specify | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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

20 What is this person's marital status?
 Now married
 Widowed
 Divorced
 Separated
 Never married → SKIP to 21

21 In the PAST 12 MONTHS did this person get -
 a. Married? Yes No
 b. Widowed? Yes No
 c. Divorced? Yes No

22 How many times has this person been married?
 Once
 Two times
 Three or more times

23 In what year did this person last get married?
 Year

24 Has this person given birth to any children in the past 12 months?
 Yes
 No

25 a. Does this person have any of his/her own grandchildren under the age of 18 living in this house or apartment?
 Yes
 No → SKIP to question 26

b. Is this grandparent currently responsible for most of the basic needs of any grandchildren under the age of 18 who live in this house or apartment?
 Yes
 No → SKIP to question 26