



New Jerseyans and Disabilities

by Sen-Yuan Wu, Research Economist

Improving the socioeconomic condition for people with disabilities and increasing their access to employment opportunities has been a public policy in New Jersey and the US. Within the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, for example, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) works to enable individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes consistent with their strengths, priorities, needs, abilities and capabilities. The DVRS assisted nearly 4,000 individuals with disabilities to achieve employment in each of the past three years.

This report provides current estimates of the socioeconomic characteristics of people with disabilities needed to facilitate planning, research, and evaluation of disability-related programs, laws and policies in New Jersey.

Who Are They?

“People with disabilities” is defined as those who have “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities” in the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* of 1990. According to the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS), 845,000 individuals, or 9.7 percent of the state’s residents, had reported having at least one type of disability – the second lowest percentage among the nation’s 50 states. Only Utah (8.5%) ranked lower than New Jersey. West Virginia’s 18.9 percent was the highest among the states. Nationally, the percentage of individuals with disabilities was 11.9 percent.

New Jersey’s population with disabilities includes more women (55%)

than men (45%). That is partly because disability prevails as people age and as senior citizens, women outnumber

men. About one-in-every-three (32.5%) elderly persons (65 and over) had some level of disability. In comparison, people with disabilities accounted for only 7.3 percent of the state’s 18-64 year-olds, and 3.5 percent of the state’s children under

age 18. The majority — 74 percent — of New Jersey’s individuals with disabilities were white, although the white share of the state’s total population was just about 69 percent. African Americans also were overrepresented among individuals with disabilities — they accounted for 13 percent

of the state’s total population and 15 percent of the state’s “disabled” population. The proportions of Hispanics (14%) and Asians (4%) among the state residents with disabilities were

lower than their corresponding shares of the state’s total population (18% and 8% respectively).

Compared with people with no disability, individuals with disabilities were less likely to be “currently married” (40.7% vs. 35.8%), but more likely to be widowed (3.4% vs. 21.8%) or divorced (6.4% vs. 11.3%) in New Jersey. Individuals with disabilities represented lower percentages of foreign born and non-citizens (16.1% and 5.7%) than those with no disability (21.5% and 11%). The percentage of college graduates was also substantially lower among individu-



According to the 2010 American Community Survey, 845,000 individuals, or 9.7 percent of New Jersey’s residents, had reported having at least one type of disability

Scan to visit Office of Research and Information online:



als with disabilities (16.8%) than their “no disability” counterparts (38.1%).

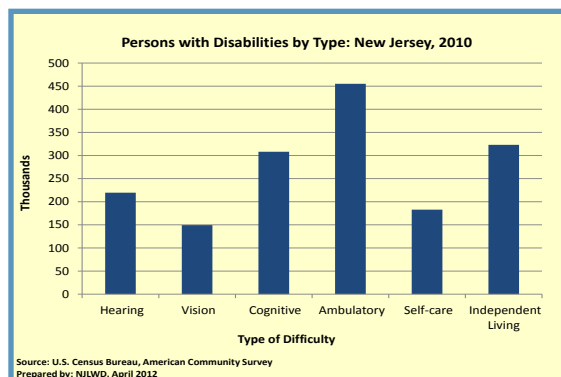
Among New Jersey’s counties, Cumberland (14.5%) and Ocean (13.2%) had the highest percentage of individuals with disabilities, while Somerset (7.3%) and Middlesex (8.0%) had the lowest percentage of disabled residents.

Type of Disability

Among New Jersey’s 845,000 individuals with disabilities, about 47.7 percent (403,006 persons) reported more than one type of disability.

“Ambulatory difficulty” is the most common type of disability in New Jersey — about 53.9 percent of individuals with disabilities (455,167 persons) had serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs. “Independent living difficulty” is the second most common type, with 323,096 persons (or 38.2%) having difficulty going outside the home to shop or visit a doctor’s office. “Cognitive difficulty” ranked a close third. Approximately 36.5 percent of the individuals with disabilities (308,148 persons) reported serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions. Other types of disabilities in New Jersey include 219,553 persons with “hearing difficulty” (deafness or serious difficulty hearing), 182,842 persons had “self-care difficulty” (difficulty bathing or dressing), and 149,400 with “vision difficulty” (blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses).

More than 60 percent of individuals with disabilities in Cape May (64.4%)



and Passaic (60.5%) counties reported “ambulatory difficulty.” The percentage with ambulatory difficulty was the lowest (41.1%) in Sussex County. Disabled individuals with “independent living difficulty” ranged from 50.9 percent in Warren County to 26.9 percent in Sussex County. Warren also had the highest percentage of individuals with “cognitive difficulty” (47.2%) among the county’s disabled population, while the rate was as low as 32.6 percent in Essex County. Individuals with “hearing difficulty” was highest in Hunterdon County (34.5%), but only one-in-five (20.6%) residents with disabilities reported “hearing difficulty” in Essex County. The percentage with “self-care difficulty” in Passaic County (30.6%) was almost twice that in Sussex County (15.8%). Passaic also had the state’s highest percentage of disabled individuals with “vision difficulty” (28.2%), while the percentage reporting that type of disability was just 10.4 percent in Sussex County.

New Jersey’s individuals with disabilities include 107,400 disabled veterans. Among them, 49,700 reported having a “service connected” disability – a disability that was a result of disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.

Employment Status

Of the 397,900 New Jerseyans who make up the population of 18-64 year olds with disabilities, approximately 183,100 (or 47%) were in the labor force, including 146,600 employed and 36,500 unemployed. The implied unemployment rate of 19.9 percent suggests that one-in-every-five in the state’s “disabled” labor force was unemployed for one reason or another. In comparison, 79.5 percent of New Jersey’s total 18-64 population was in the labor

New Jersey’s individuals with disabilities include 107,400 disabled veterans. Among them, 49,700 reported having a “service connected” disability

