

A Step by Step Guide to Accessing Disability Data in the American Community Survey

RTC: Rural, the University of Montana

Accessing the data

Step 1. Use the American Fact Finder tool developed by the US Census.

Go to: www.factfinder.census.gov. Click on “Advanced Search”, then click on “show me all”. This will take you to a new page where you can specify the parameters of your search.

Step 2. Select your dataset

In order to ensure that you are accessing the most current data, you must first specify the dataset. The most current dataset for disability data at the county level for all US counties are the 2013 ACS 5 year estimates.

On the left side of the screen click on “topics”. When the dialogue box pops up click on the “+” sign next to datasets. Select the 2013 ACS 5 year estimates. Once you select this dataset you will see it appear underneath the “your selections” box on the left hand side of the screen.

Step 3. Select for disability

Now it is time to select for disability data. Keeping the topics dialogue box open, click on the “+” sign next to “people”. Then click on the “+” sign next to “disability”. Select the first option that just says “disability”. The other options are more refined disability selections, focusing only on mobility, self-care or independent living. All these categories can be found in the more general “disability” selection.

Step 4. Select for Geography

Next it is time to select for geography. This is where you will specify that you want county level data. Close out of the “select topics” dialogue box and open the geography dialogue box (also found on the left hand side of the screen). Click on the drop down menu that says “select geography type”. Click on counties from the drop down list. Some additional drop down menus will appear. Select a state from the state drop down menu. Then select the county or counties that you are interested in. To select more than one county hold down the “ctrl” key on your keyboard while you make your selections. You also have the option of looking at data for all counties in the state (or alternatively for all counties in the US). When you have highlighted the county or counties you wish to select click on the grey “add to your selections” button below the option box. Close out of the select geographies dialogue box.

Step 5. Select your data table

Now that you have specified all the parameters for the data you are interested in it is time to select which data table will have the most appropriate data. Data tables that fit your selections appear in the main dialogue box in the middle of your screen.

For standard disability data breakdowns “Table S1810 Disability Characteristics” should suffice. This table will likely be the first in the list of data tables. This table provides disability data broken down by age, sex, disability type, and race. See below for more information on different tables and variables in the factfinder.

Step 6. Download the data

The data that you see presented on your screen can be downloaded into different file formats. Towards the top center of your screen is a row of blue text with options for saving, printing or downloading the data table you have selected.

Click on download. A dialogue box will pop up giving you several options for how to download your data. The first few options are for .csv files, or comma delimited files. Download the data in this form if you want to use the data in an outside program for data analysis or for making a map.

The next options for downloading are the “presentation ready formats”. Selecting the PDF option will give you a detailed data table of the counties you have selected. You can choose some formatting for the table by choosing orientation and paper size. Select landscape orientation when viewing data for multiple counties.

The Microsoft Excel option will give you one detailed data table with the counties you have selected displayed across columns. The Excel download option only works for smaller downloads, those with 230 columns or less. For example, this download will not generally not accommodate data for every county in a state

The final option for presentation ready downloads is a rich text format (.rtf). Larger downloads (i.e. for 10 counties or more) can take more time with this option. Like the PDF, selecting a landscape layout is best for viewing multiple counties.

Additional Disability Data tables

Table S1811 (Selected economic characteristics for the civilian non-institutionalized population by disability status). This table provides detailed information about disability, employment, poverty status, and income/earnings.

Table C21007 (Age by veteran status by poverty status in the past 12 months by disability status for the civilian population 18 year and over). This table provides data on veteran status, poverty, age and disability

Table C18108 (Age by number of disabilities). This table provides data on age and the number of disabilities reported (i.e. one, two or more, none).

Table B22010 (Receipt of Food Stamps/SNAP in the past 12 months by disability status for households). This table provides data comparing households that receive food stamps by disability status of residents.

Table B18135 (Age by Disability Status by Health Insurance Coverage). This table provides data on age, health insurance coverage and disability status. It's important to note that this data was collected prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

Various other tables look at breakdowns across age, disability type, sex and some employment indicators. Take some time exploring the data available to find exactly what you are looking for!

What about rural?

The US Census defines rural and urban areas based population density. Cities and towns with populations of 2,500 or more are classified as urban. All other areas are classified as rural.

The American factfinder provides a basic population count by county indicating how much of the county population lives in an urban area vs. a rural area. This is useful for determining what percentage of the population lives in a rural area for your counties of interest. However, this data does not provide a classification by county (i.e. designating an entire county as urban or rural), nor does it allow for any further analysis of the populations in urban vs. rural.

Different government agencies (i.e. the USDA) define rural and urban areas at the county level. The RTC: Rural is developing an online tool to help you identify the rural classification of your counties of interest. On the website you can also learn more about urban/rural classifications and check out some related maps.

Check out the website and tell us what you think!

Rural Disability Data Lookup: <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/devl/disabilitycountstest/>