

A Step-by-Step Guide to Accessing Disability Data

This guide, created by RTC:Rural at the University of Montana, provides step-by-step instructions on how to access disability data from the American Community Survey, using the American FactFinder. NOTE: For access to the most recent disability rates by county, it is easiest to use our [Disability Counts data lookup tool](#).

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Introduction to Disability Data and the American Community Survey

Data are information, facts, or statistics that have been collected, measured, and analyzed and can help people make decisions that affect the quality of life for groups and individuals in a community. Disability data can be used to gain a better understanding of your community and outreach areas, to inform policy development, or to build community outreach materials.

The [American FactFinder](#) provides access to data about the United States, Puerto Rico and the Island Areas and can be used to access data on disability. The data in American FactFinder come from several censuses and surveys, including the American Community Survey. The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey that collects population and housing information every year. The ACS includes a set of [disability indicator questions](#) to determine disability. If a respondent can answer “yes” to any disability question they are classified as having a disability.

Each year the ACS releases single- and multi-year estimates. Single-year estimates include geographic areas with a population of 65,000 or more, which does not include rural areas. To view data on rural areas, you will need to access the five-year data sets. These provide the most precise estimates, and are the only datasets that include rural areas.

RTC:Rural provides a [simple data lookup tool](#) that is the easiest way to can view and download the most recent data on disability rates and rural status of every county of the US and Puerto Rico. [Click here to use our Disability Counts data lookup tool](#). However, if you are looking for more complex data, the following guide will help you through the process of getting this information from the American FactFinder.

Accessing Disability Data using the American FactFinder

Step 1. Use the American FactFinder tool developed by the US Census

1. Go to: factfinder.census.gov
2. Click on “Advanced Search”
3. 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.

1. On the left side of the screen click on “Topics”.
2. When the dialogue box pops up click on the “+” sign next to “Dataset” (located at the bottom of the list).
3. Select the dataset that best fits your needs. If you are interested in rural disability data, select the most current ACS 5-year estimates.
 - o Remember that data for rural areas is only available in the 5-year estimates. The 1-year estimates only contain data for more urban areas.
 - o It is important to note that 5-year estimates are released one year after they are collected. For example, the 2015 dataset was released in late 2016.
 - o Once you select a search topic, you will see it appear underneath the “Your Selections” box on the upper left hand side of the screen.

Step 3. Select for Disability

1. Keeping the Topics dialogue box open, click on the “+” sign next to “People” (located at the top of the list).
2. Then click on the “+” sign next to “Disability”.
3. Select the first option that just says “Disability”.
 - o 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

This is where you will specify that you want county-level data.

1. Close out of the “Select Topics” dialogue box and open the “Geographies” dialogue box
 - o This box is also found on the left hand side of the screen.
2. Click on the drop down menu that says “Select a geographic type.”
3. Click on “County” (“... County- 050”) in the drop down list.
4. Some additional drop down menus will appear.
5. Select a state from the “Select a state” drop down menu.
6. Then select the county or counties that you are interested in from the “Select one or more geographic areas and click “Add to Your Selections” drop down menu.
 - o To select more than one county hold down the “ctrl” key on your keyboard while you make your selections.
 - o You also have the option of looking at data for all counties in the state (or alternatively for all counties in the US).
7. 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.
8. 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.

1. Data tables that fit your selections appear in the main dialogue box in the middle of your screen.
2. 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.
3. See the section [Additional Disability Data Tables](#) 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.

1. Click on “Download.”
2. A dialogue box will pop up giving you several options for how to download your data. The first few options are for “Comma delimited (.csv) format.”
 - .csv is compatible with spreadsheet programs such as Microsoft Excel.
3. 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”. Three options are available:

1. PDF
 - 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.
2. Microsoft Excel
 - 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 with 230 columns or less.
 - For example, this download will not generally accommodate data for every county in a state.
3. 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 is important to note that this data was collected prior to the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

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 (such as the USDA) define rural and urban areas at the county level. To learn more about urban/rural classifications, visit RTC:Rural's [Defining Rural](#) resources page and check out some related [Geography and Rural Disability maps](#).

This work is part of the [Geography of Disability Project](#). ©2016 RTC:Rural.

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