

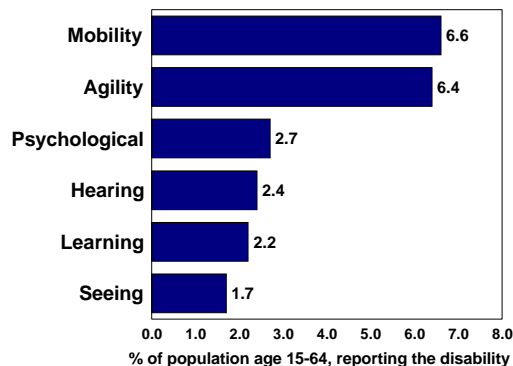
Earnings & Employment Trends ♦ December 2003

Persons with Disabilities – Their Participation in the Workforce

Statistics Canada conducted a *Participation and Activity Limitations Survey (PALS)* in 2001 as a follow-up to the Census. The survey targeted persons who identified on their Census return that their everyday activities were limited because of a physical or mental condition or a health problem.

Types of disabilities and the aging process

In 2001, 11.2 per cent of the working age population in BC had a disability. Agility and mobility were the most prevalent problems but psychological disabilities were also a major factor.



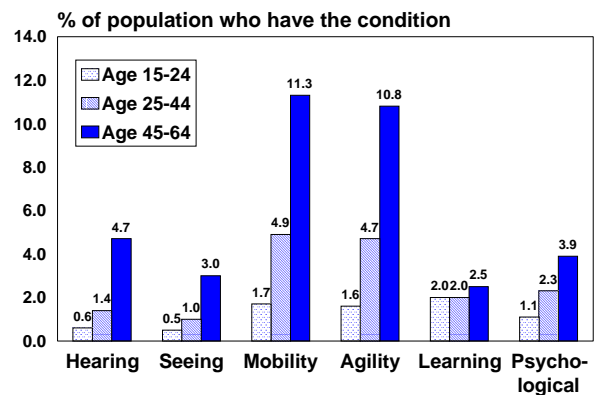
The results from this survey show that in BC more than one out of 10 persons (11.2%) in the working age population, defined here as those age 15 to 64, had a disability. The conditions most prevalent were mobility and agility (over 6 per cent of the population are affected) and psychological problems (just less than 3 per cent noted the disability).

As one would expect, the probability of having a disability increases with age. Once disabled, an individual is often afflicted for the remainder of their life, meaning that as an age cohort moves through life, more and more of the cohort develop disabilities through disease or injury. In 2001, the breakdown of disability rates by age group within the 15-64 year old population was as follows:

Age	% Disabled
15-24	4.9
25-44	8.4
45-64	17.8

Besides the incidence of disability increasing, the types of conditions also vary by age.

The profile of the disabled by type of disability varies dramatically between the young and the middle aged.



Note: Many of the disabled have multiple conditions. Mobility and agility problems particularly go hand-in-hand.

The previous chart shows how the stage of life shapes the profile of persons with disabilities.¹ Among the young, the most prevalent condition is learning disabilities, As this problem is not likely to develop after

¹ *It is interesting to look at the chart from the perspective of one age cohort moving through life, although the age cohorts displayed are all different groups of people.*

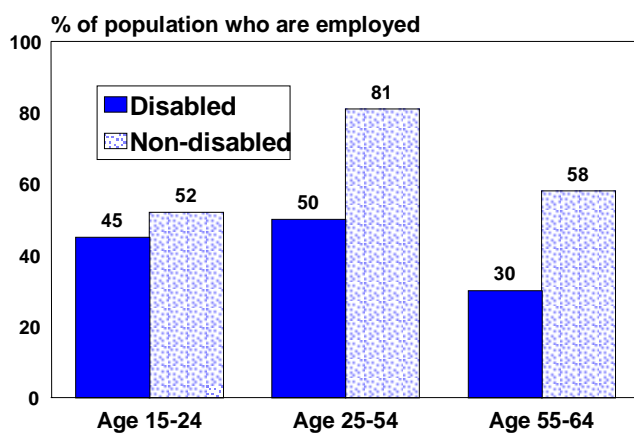
childhood, the probability of having a learning disability remains fairly constant as one ages. However, other health problems resulting from the wear and tear of living, such as mobility and agility, become far and away, the most prevalent disability in the later years of life.

As well, among those disabled, the severity of the disability increases with age. Less than half the young age group (age 15–24) had more than a mild disability compared to two-thirds of those aged 25–64.

Pain is a big issue for the disabled. Of all those who reported a disability, three out of four suffered from pain. That translates to 8 per cent of the working age population suffering from a debilitating pain. This is true for 3 per cent of the 15–24 year olds and for 13 per cent of all those age 45–64.

Disabilities and the Workplace

Labour market outcome comparisons between the disabled and non-disabled show only small discrepancies among the young but towards the end of a worklife, those with disabilities are half as likely to have a job as those without disabilities.



Among the prime working age population, those age 25–54, only 50 per cent of the disabled population have a job. This compares to 81 per cent among those not disabled. The difference is even more dramatic for the 55–64 year olds, where those

without disabilities are more than twice as likely to hold a job than the disabled.

This low employment participation among the disabled has a major impact on the size of the workforce in BC. If persons with disabilities were able to work at the same level as their counterparts without disabilities, there would be an additional 80,000 persons age 25 to 64 with jobs. While it is not reasonable to assume that all the disabled would be able to work, it is not out-of-line to project that one-half that number could work if conditions were right. This translates into an additional 40,000 (or 2%) potential workers whose skills are not being utilized in today's labour market.

Furthermore, because most of those in the 25–64 age group who are disabled acquired their disability well after the age of 25, they would have completed their education and attained many years of work experience prior to becoming disabled. In fact, the education attainment of the disabled and the non-disabled are not that different – for example, the proportion of the disabled population with a post-secondary credential is 52 per cent, only 7 percentage points lower than the 59 per cent reported by the non-disabled.

In conclusion, there is a pool of well-educated and experienced potential workers out there, who if given the opportunity could contribute directly to the economy of the province. With labour shortages on the horizon, it could very well behave employers to examine their policies on accommodating persons with disabilities in their workplaces, be it through providing accessible facilities and appropriate equipment; flexible hours and shorter work weeks or allowing work to be done from the home.

Data Source: Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitations Survey 2001 (PALS)