

Disability Characteristics of Income-Based Government Assistance Recipients in the United States: 2011

American Community Survey Briefs

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Since the Great Depression of the 1930s, federal and state governments have been involved with lessening the consequences of economic hardship through various assistance programs. These programs have delivered relief through cash and/or in-kind assistance. These social assistance programs have relied, at least in part, on an individual's or family's income or other economic means to determine who may qualify for benefits, hence the term *income-based assistance*.¹ Understanding the characteristics of people that receive assistance may help governments coordinate and administer these programs better.

Disability status is an important characteristic of people receiving assistance for two reasons. First, some income-based assistance programs require that recipients have both low income and some kind of disability.² The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, for instance, requires low-income individuals to either have a disability or be aged 65 or older.³ Furthermore, some income-based assistance programs allow recipients of another program that uses disability for eligibility to qualify automatically. For example,

¹ For the programs included in this brief, applicants are evaluated on several criteria, including income, resources (e.g., savings), and employment status. Other terms, such as "means-tested," may also be used to describe these programs. A definition of "means-tested" can be found in Kim, Jeongsoo, Shelley K. Irving, and Tracy A. Loveless, "Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Participation in Government Programs, 2004 to 2007 and 2009: Who Gets Assistance?," *Current Population Reports*, P70-130, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2012. Available at <www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-130.pdf>.

² Medicaid uses the term "beneficiary" for program enrollees whereas the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) use the term "recipient." In order to be consistent with the majority of the programs, this brief will use the term "recipient" for all programs.

³ The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers the SSI program. For more information on SSI, go to the SSA's Web site on SSI at <www.ssa.gov/pgm/ssi.htm>.

DEFINITIONS:

Cash assistance—assistance that is given in the form of cash or money income.

In-kind assistance—assistance that is given in the form of services, goods, or vouchers.

Recipient—an individual who receives government assistance based on eligibility criteria set by the federal and state governments.

With a disability—having vision, hearing, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulty.

Vision difficulty—blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.

Hearing difficulty—deafness or serious difficulty hearing.

Cognitive difficulty—serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions.

Ambulatory difficulty—serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.

Self-care difficulty—difficulty bathing or dressing.

Independent living difficulty—having difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping.

some states have criteria that automatically qualify SSI recipients for Medicaid and do not make their own disability determination. Alternatively, states may exempt income derived from government programs that target individuals with disabilities. For example, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) does not include SSI payments in the calculation of income for eligibility.⁴

The second reason disability is an important characteristic is due to the economic disparities between individuals with and without disabilities that may contribute to the need for government assistance. About one-in-three adults aged 18 to 64 with disabilities were employed in 2011, while three out of every four adults within the same age group and without a disability were

employed.⁵ Among those who did work, the median annual earnings for individuals with disabilities was \$19,735, compared with \$30,285 for those without a disability.⁶ With lower employment and earnings, on average, individuals with disabilities would appear to be at greater risk for needing assistance.

This brief presents information from the 2011 American Community Survey (ACS) showing the prevalence of disability among civilian noninstitutionalized adults aged 18 and older who received income-based government assistance—cash assistance programs (SSI, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or other government assistance) and in-kind assistance programs (SNAP

and Medicaid).^{7,8,9} These data are presented for the nation and states to highlight the geographic variation of disability in this population. The civilian noninstitutionalized population does not include adults living in institutions like correctional facilities and nursing homes.

NATION

In 2011, nearly 46.0 million people, or 19.8 percent of the civilian noninstitutionalized population aged 18 years and older, received income-based government assistance through SSI, SNAP, Medicaid, TANF,

⁷ The ACS contains questions about Medicaid coverage, SNAP, SSI, TANF, and other public assistance. Receipt of TANF and other cash government assistance are asked as a single “public assistance” question and, as such, the Census Bureau cannot disaggregate TANF receipt from these other cash assistance programs.

⁸ TANF is a grant program in which state governments provide recipients short-term cash assistance and support in finding a job. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) oversees the administration of TANF. For more information about TANF, visit <www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tanf>.

⁹ Medicaid, overseen by HHS, provides health coverage to people with low incomes, people with disabilities, pregnant women, and senior citizens. State governments, which administer Medicaid, can change eligibility requirements. However, their requirements must exceed the requirements set by the federal government. For more information about Medicaid, please go to <www.medicaid.gov/>.

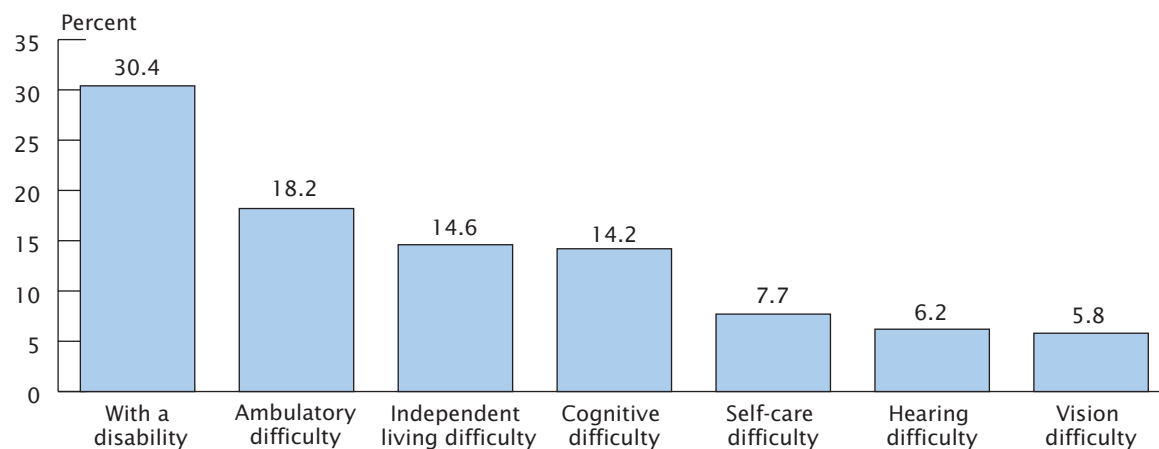
⁴ SNAP gives recipients an electronic benefit transfer card to purchase food. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) oversees SNAP and state governments implement the program. Family size, disability status, age, receipt of other government assistance, and other resources determine household eligibility requirements. For more information on SNAP, go to the USDA's Web site on SNAP at <www.fns.usda.gov/snap/Default.htm>.

⁵ B18120. Employment Status by Disability Status and Type, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/11_1YR/B18120>.

⁶ B18140. Median Earnings in the Past 12 Months (in 2011 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars) by Disability Status by Sex for the Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population 16 Years and Over With Earnings, <http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/11_1YR/B18140>.

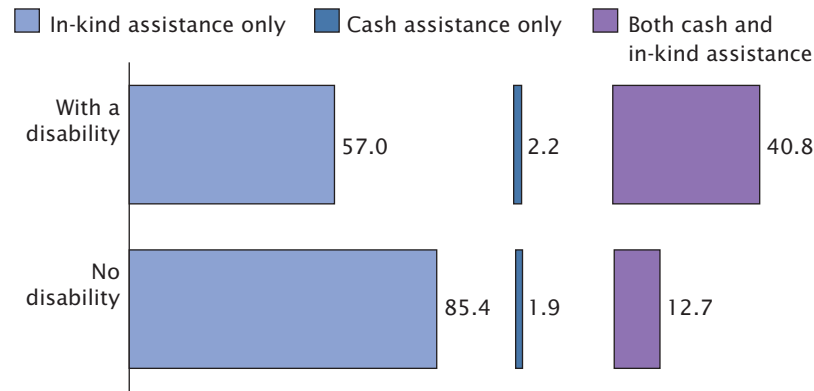
Figure 1.
Disability Prevalence and Type Among Income-Based Government Assistance Recipients: 2011

(Civilian noninstitutionalized population 18 years and older who received assistance)



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Surveys.

Figure 2.
Distribution of Income-Based Government Assistance Type by Disability Status: 2011
 (Civilian noninstitutionalized population 18 years and older who received assistance)

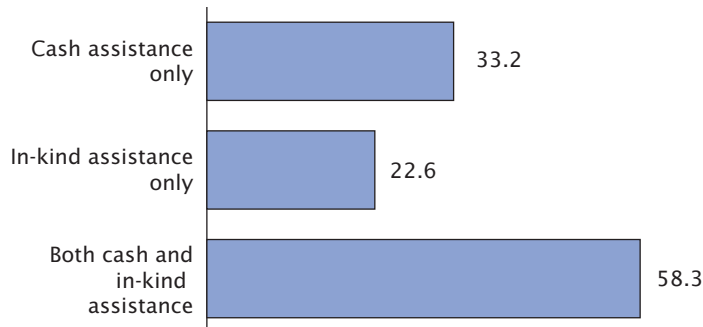


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.

among the population aged 18 and older who received income-based government assistance in 2011.

As shown in Figure 2, the distribution of government assistance types—cash assistance only, in-kind assistance only, and both cash and in-kind assistance—is different for those with and without disabilities. Both recipients with and without disabilities were more likely to receive only in-kind assistance, with 57.0 percent and 85.4 percent, respectively, receiving only this type. Cash assistance only was the least likely for both groups as 2.2 percent of those with a disability and 1.9 percent of those without disabilities received only cash assistance. Nearly 41.0 percent of recipients with a disability and 12.7 percent of recipients with no disability received both cash and in-kind assistance.

Figure 3.
Disability Prevalence by Government Assistance Type
 (Civilian noninstitutionalized population 18 years and older who received assistance)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey.

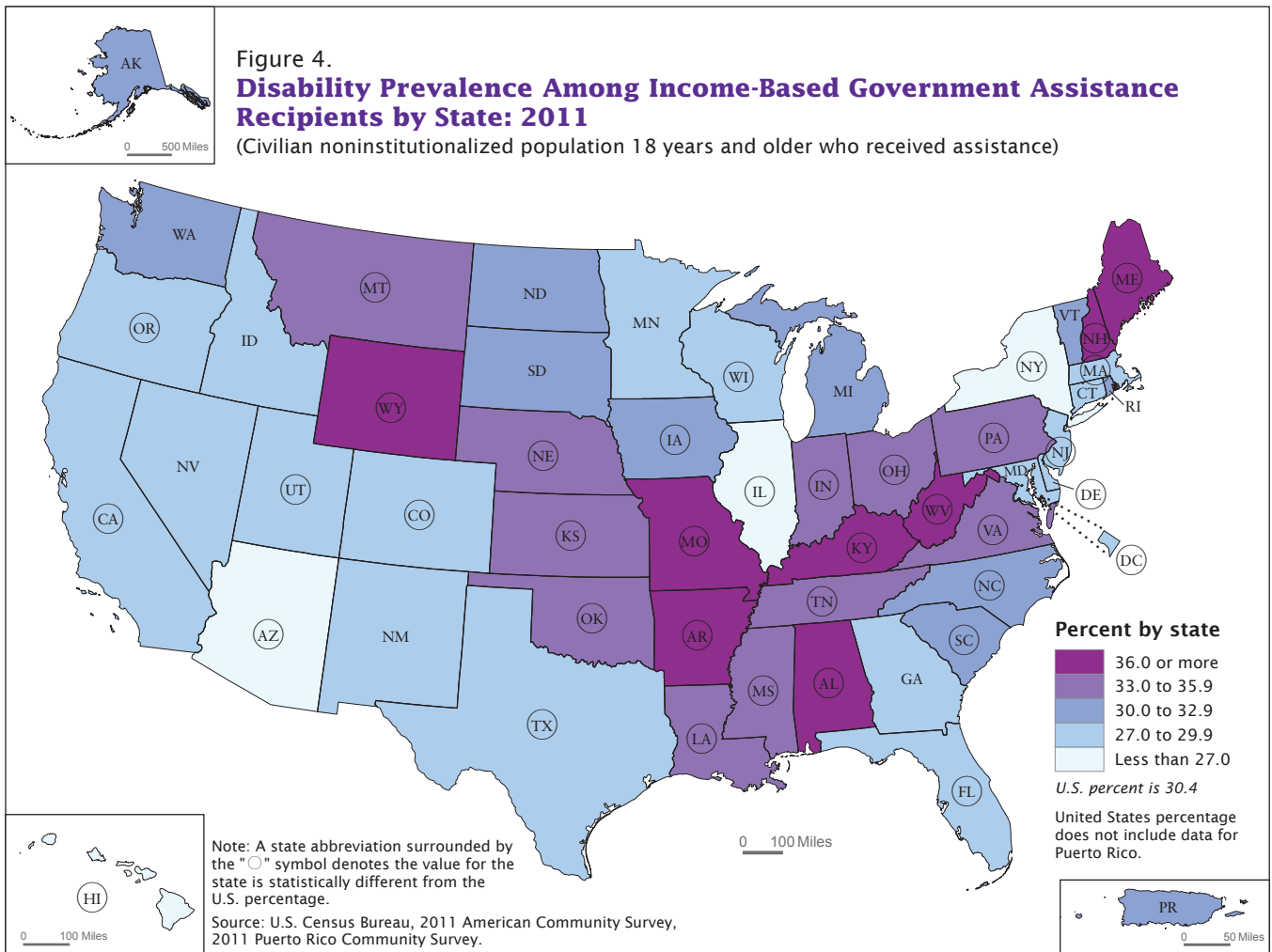
Figure 3 shows the disability prevalence among the three assistance groups. Within the population that received both cash and in-kind benefits, 58.3 percent of recipients had a disability. Individuals who received only cash assistance had a disability rate of 33.2 percent. Those collecting only in-kind benefits had the lowest rate of disability at 22.6 percent. However, as shown in Figure 2, individuals who received only cash assistance were a small proportion of individuals receiving income-based government assistance.

or other government assistance. Among individuals who received government assistance, 14.0 million people, or 30.4 percent, had one or more types of disability (see text box on page 1). By disability type, 18.2 percent of assistance recipients had difficulty walking or climbing stairs (*ambulatory difficulty*) and

14.6 percent had an *independent living difficulty* disability, defined as difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping. About 14.2 percent had difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions (*cognitive difficulty*). Figure 1 shows the disability prevalence

STATES

Federal and state governments work together in creating and administering government assistance programs, including setting eligibility requirements and the amount of cash assistance to be received. The disability rate among the population who received income-based assistance ranged from 25.1 percent in Arizona to 41.7



percent in West Virginia (Table 1).¹⁰ Twenty-two states had disability rates above the national estimate of 30.4 percent among those receiving assistance, while 15 states had rates below the national estimate.

As shown in Figure 4, states along and immediately west of the Appalachian mountain range tended to have higher rates of disability among the population that received income-based assistance. States in the southwest and along the eastern seaboard tended to have lower rates of disability.

¹⁰ The disability rate for people receiving income-based assistance in Arizona was not statistically different from the rates in New York or Hawaii. The disability rate in West Virginia was not statistically different from the rate in Wyoming.

States with higher disability rates in the total civilian noninstitutionalized population also tended to experience high disability rates in the population receiving assistance.¹¹ For instance, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Arkansas were among the top five states for disability prevalence in the total population and in the population of those receiving assistance. However, there were exceptions that may reflect the population of people with disabilities being more concentrated (or less concentrated) in the population of those receiving assistance.

¹¹ State ranking for disability prevalence in the total civilian noninstitutionalized population can be found in Ranking Table R1810 available at http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/ACS/11_1YR/R1810.US01PRF.

For example, Wyoming and New Hampshire were near the middle of the ranking of states for disability prevalence in the total population, but were among the top for disability prevalence in the population receiving assistance. Conversely, Oregon had an overall disability rate above the U.S. estimate, but was below the U.S. estimate for prevalence among people receiving assistance. Differences in relative rankings may be associated with characteristics relating to the eligibility for assistance and the receipt of non-income-based programs like Social Security and Medicare.

Table 1.

Disability Prevalence and Type Among Income-Based Government Assistance Recipients: 2011

(For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www)

Geography	Government assistance recipients		With a disability		Cognitive difficulty		Ambulatory difficulty		Self-care or independent living difficulty	
	Number	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)	Percent	Margin of error ¹ (±)
United States...	45,985,574	146,454	30.4	0.1	14.2	0.1	18.2	0.1	15.9	0.1
Alabama	832,803	16,132	36.5	1.1	16.6	0.8	23.7	0.9	19.4	0.9
Alaska	83,865	5,247	31.7	2.3	13.5	1.9	17.3	1.9	14.2	2.1
Arizona	1,084,878	27,901	25.1	0.9	11.6	0.7	14.6	0.7	12.9	0.7
Arkansas	477,730	13,751	37.2	1.3	16.1	1.0	23.3	1.1	18.4	1.0
California	5,294,634	42,612	27.9	0.3	13.0	0.3	16.5	0.3	16.1	0.3
Colorado	540,712	15,629	29.1	1.2	13.8	0.8	15.7	0.8	13.9	0.7
Connecticut	478,026	12,893	29.8	1.3	14.5	1.0	17.3	0.9	15.0	0.8
Delaware	135,892	7,704	27.7	2.2	13.1	1.6	16.7	1.6	14.4	1.8
District of Columbia	126,489	5,672	27.8	2.1	13.2	1.6	17.9	1.7	14.6	1.4
Florida	3,180,745	44,612	28.2	0.5	12.7	0.4	17.1	0.4	14.6	0.4
Georgia	1,489,488	30,837	29.9	0.7	13.5	0.5	18.5	0.6	15.2	0.5
Hawaii	204,358	10,936	25.2	2.0	13.0	1.6	15.1	1.6	13.6	1.5
Idaho	214,772	9,452	28.7	1.9	14.6	1.5	15.5	1.1	14.5	1.4
Illinois	1,837,242	28,430	26.7	0.5	11.9	0.4	16.3	0.4	14.3	0.4
Indiana	857,161	20,317	33.4	0.9	16.0	0.6	19.8	0.7	16.7	0.6
Iowa	375,881	11,926	32.4	1.1	15.4	0.9	18.0	0.9	16.2	0.8
Kansas	294,030	8,759	35.6	1.4	17.6	1.2	20.6	1.1	19.6	1.2
Kentucky	731,907	15,912	39.4	0.9	18.2	0.7	24.7	0.7	19.9	0.9
Louisiana	783,716	17,771	33.8	1.1	16.0	0.8	21.0	0.8	17.2	0.8
Maine	254,387	9,431	36.9	1.6	18.1	1.1	20.0	1.4	17.0	1.1
Maryland	689,611	17,134	29.5	1.1	14.5	0.9	17.1	0.8	15.8	0.8
Massachusetts	1,124,994	21,072	29.3	0.8	14.2	0.6	16.4	0.6	15.4	0.6
Michigan	1,832,791	21,663	30.4	0.5	14.9	0.4	17.6	0.4	15.8	0.4
Minnesota	623,495	12,011	29.9	1.0	15.2	0.7	15.3	0.7	15.6	0.6
Mississippi	560,897	14,603	34.9	1.1	16.7	0.9	23.2	0.9	18.9	0.9
Missouri	850,963	18,316	36.0	1.0	17.5	0.7	21.8	0.7	18.4	0.7
Montana	114,762	6,521	34.5	2.6	17.9	2.0	20.4	2.4	17.0	1.8
Nebraska	170,415	7,099	33.7	1.7	16.8	1.4	18.8	1.2	15.5	1.3
Nevada	331,571	16,069	29.0	2.2	12.0	1.2	18.8	1.8	15.5	1.7
New Hampshire	131,643	6,444	37.8	2.2	17.6	2.1	22.0	1.8	20.0	1.5
New Jersey	937,574	18,151	29.4	0.7	13.4	0.6	18.0	0.6	17.0	0.6
New Mexico	369,922	11,246	29.2	1.6	14.3	1.1	17.8	1.3	14.6	1.0
New York	3,540,176	35,402	25.7	0.4	11.2	0.3	15.9	0.3	13.0	0.3
North Carolina	1,452,987	25,310	31.9	0.7	14.4	0.5	19.5	0.6	16.8	0.6
North Dakota	58,991	3,851	31.9	2.8	15.7	2.3	17.0	2.0	13.3	2.1
Ohio	1,692,080	22,963	33.9	0.5	16.9	0.4	20.0	0.5	17.4	0.4
Oklahoma	558,172	11,356	35.4	1.1	15.7	0.8	21.7	0.9	17.2	0.8
Oregon	740,057	17,315	27.8	1.0	13.7	0.6	15.9	0.7	13.1	0.8
Pennsylvania	1,776,632	23,869	35.2	0.6	17.1	0.5	20.5	0.5	18.4	0.4
Rhode Island	161,261	7,965	32.3	2.5	15.0	1.5	18.6	1.8	15.5	1.6
South Carolina	757,024	18,761	31.8	1.1	14.0	0.8	19.9	0.9	16.2	0.8
South Dakota	90,725	5,552	31.4	2.6	14.9	2.2	18.2	1.9	15.2	2.0
Tennessee	1,134,805	19,480	34.9	0.9	17.2	0.6	21.7	0.6	18.2	0.7
Texas	3,517,485	46,066	28.6	0.5	12.6	0.3	17.7	0.4	15.1	0.4
Utah	273,112	12,324	27.8	1.8	14.4	1.2	15.5	1.3	15.3	1.4
Vermont	111,616	4,812	31.1	1.7	15.9	1.5	16.3	1.4	14.6	1.4
Virginia	858,709	21,726	33.4	1.0	15.9	0.7	20.3	0.8	17.4	0.7
Washington	1,054,021	23,510	31.0	0.9	16.2	0.7	17.4	0.7	16.0	0.7
West Virginia	326,563	10,254	41.7	1.5	20.2	1.0	26.8	1.4	20.9	1.2
Wisconsin	820,594	13,625	28.5	0.8	13.6	0.6	16.2	0.6	14.1	0.6
Wyoming	43,210	4,319	40.0	3.9	19.8	4.0	23.2	3.3	19.4	3.2
Puerto Rico	1,468,966	20,283	30.0	0.7	14.1	0.6	16.6	0.5	16.1	0.6

¹ Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability. A margin of error is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the margin of error is in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable estimate. This number when added to and subtracted from the estimate forms the 90 percent interval.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey, 2011 Puerto Rico Community Survey.

What Is the American Community Survey?

The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, social, economic, and housing data for the nation, states, congressional districts, counties, places, and other localities every year. It has an annual sample size of about 3.3 million addresses across the United States and Puerto Rico and includes both housing units and group quarters (e.g., nursing facilities and prisons). The ACS is conducted in every county throughout the nation, and every municipio in Puerto Rico, where it is called the Puerto Rico Community Survey. Beginning in 2006, ACS data for 2005 were released for geographic areas with populations of 65,000 and greater. For information on the ACS sample design and other topics, visit www.census.gov/acs/www.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about disability in the United States, see the Census Bureau Web site on Disability at www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability/ or contact the Health and Disability Statistics Branch of the Census Bureau

at 301-763-9112 or e-mail at matthew.w.brault@census.gov.

SOURCE AND ACCURACY

The data presented in this report are based on the ACS sample interviewed in 2011. The estimates based on this sample approximate the actual values and represent the entire household and group quarters population. Sampling

error is the difference between an estimate based in a sample and the corresponding value that would be obtained if the estimate were based on the entire population (as from a census). Measures of the sampling errors are provided in the form of margins of error for all estimates included in this report. All comparative statements in this report have undergone statistical testing, and comparisons are significant at the 90 percent level unless otherwise noted. In addition to sampling error, nonsampling error may be introduced during any of the operations used to collect and process survey data such as editing, reviewing, or keying data from questionnaires. For more information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and nonsampling errors, please see the 2011 ACS Accuracy of the Data document located at www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/data_documentation/Accuracy/ACS_Accuracy_of_Data_2011.pdf.