

## Introduction

Based on the American Community Survey's definition of disability, people with disabilities represented approximately 12.7% of the United States population and 14.8% of Vermont's population in 2022. This edition of Kevin's Corner reviews the labor force participation of people with disabilities and how it has changed in recent years.

### Sources

This review relies on data from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS samples approximately 3.5 million households each year to produce a wide range of social and demographic data. The Vermont sample includes about 15,000 households and people in group quarters annually. About half that number complete final interviews.

Data is published as 1-year and 5-year estimates. Most Vermont data is published as 5-year estimates to provide a more robust sample size. A conceptual change in 2008 means that estimates prior to that year are not comparable with later data. Therefore the earliest comparisons here are 5-year 2012 estimates which compile data from 2008 to 2012.

Note: Data related to labor force participation in the ACS is limited to the civilian noninstitutional population 18 to 64 years of age. All data presented here is in relation to that cohort.

### Defining disability

The American Community Survey defines disability as a serious difficulty with one more of four basic areas of functioning: hearing, vision, cognition and ambulation. To these it adds limitations that create difficulties with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, or performing errands such as shopping. A series of questions within the ACS is used to determine if a respondent or household member is considered to be a person with a disability.

## Labor Force Participation

### Share of the population with a disability

As stated in the previous section, this analysis applies to the civilian noninstitutional population between the ages of 18 and 64. Among that population, 12.1% of Vermonters meet the ACS definition of a person with a disability. Nationwide that percentage was 10.5%. Both of these represent an increase over the estimates from a decade ago, the 5-year 2012 estimates. At that time the ACS reported that 11.0% of Vermonters and 10.0% of people nationwide had a disability.

While the sample size is small, the 2022 1-year estimate indicates that the trend towards higher rates of disability continues. In those estimates the Vermont share of the population with a disability increased to 13.0% while the nationwide figure increased to 11.0%. See Table 1. *Note: Data in the introduction is for all people; Table 1 is restricted to the 18-64 age cohort. Therefore the figures differ.*

Table 1: Disability rates among the civilian population age 18-64

Estimate	Vermont	United States
<b>2022 5-year</b>	12.1%	10.5%
<b>2017 5-year</b>	11.8%	10.4%
<b>2012 5-year</b>	11.0%	10.0%

### Labor force participation rates

The labor force participation rate among people with disabilities is lower than that of the population of people without disabilities. This is true of both Vermont and the nation. In the 2012 5-year estimate the labor force participation rate for people with disabilities in Vermont was 47.6%. It fell slightly to 45.6% in the 2017 5-year estimate and then increased to 46.5% in the 2022 5-year. Nationally, the participation rate of people with disabilities followed a somewhat similar trend. It fell from 42.3% in 2012 to 41.4% in 2017, then rebounded to 45.5% in 2022. See Table 2.

*Table 2: Labor force participation rate of people with disabilities*

Estimate	Vermont	United States
<b>2022 5-year</b>	46.5%	45.5%
<b>2017 5-year</b>	45.6%	41.4%
<b>2012 5-year</b>	47.6%	42.3%

The pandemic caused many firms to rethink workplace accommodations and increase the flexibility of work arrangements. Advocates hoped this more accommodative stance would increase labor force participation among people with disabilities. Table 3 compares recent 1-year ACS estimates with the years prior to the pandemic. Both the state and nationwide rates show an increase in the years since the pandemic.

Between 2019 and 2022 the US figures, based on a robust sample, increased from 43.4% to 49.0%. This represents an increase of 5.6 percentage points or 12.9%. Vermont’s much smaller sample increased from 44.7% in 2019 to 53.8% in 2022, an increase of 9.1 percentage points or 20.4%.

One possible explanation for this: The pandemic-era changes that led businesses to be more flexible and accommodative of all employees served to increase the labor force participation of people with disabilities.

*Table 3: Labor force participation rates of people with disabilities 2018 – 2022\**

Estimate	Vermont	United States
<b>2022 1-year</b>	53.8%	49.0%
<b>2021 1-year</b>	49.0%	47.0%
<b>2019 1-year</b>	44.7%	43.4%
<b>2018 1-year</b>	45.8%	42.3%

\*Census did not publish 1-year estimates for 2020

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*Unemployment rate among people with disabilities*

Unemployment rates are heavily-influenced by the business cycle, decreasing in periods of economic growth and increasing in periods of economic contraction. In order to reduce the impact of business cycle factors in this analysis we review the relationship of the unemployment rates of people with and without disabilities through time, focusing on three sets of 5-year ACS data: 2012, 2017 and 2022.

The 2012 5-year estimates show Vermont’s unemployment rate of 16.3% among people with disabilities. The rate for Vermonters without disabilities in that same period was 5.8%. The rate for people with disabilities was therefore 2.8x higher. The national unemployment rate for people with and without disabilities was 17.8% and 6.8% respectively. The period includes the 2008 recession.

In the 2017 5-year ACS the unemployment rate among Vermonters with disabilities fell to 11.4%. The rate among Vermonters without disabilities fell to 3.9%. The comparable US rates were 14.2% and 6.0% respectively.

For the 2022 period (including the period of the pandemic) Vermont’s unemployment rate for people with disabilities fell to 10.1% while the rate for people without disabilities was 3.4%. The comparable national figures were 11.5% and 4.9% respectively. See Table 4.

*Table 4: Unemployment rates for people with and without disabilities*

Estimate	Disability status	Vermont	United States
<b>2022 5-year</b>	<i>With disability</i>	10.1%	11.5%
	<i>Without disability</i>	3.4%	4.9%
<b>2017 5-year</b>	<i>With disability</i>	11.4%	14.2%
	<i>Without disability</i>	3.9%	6.0%
<b>2012 5-year</b>	<i>With disability</i>	16.3%	17.8%
	<i>Without disability</i>	5.8%	6.8%