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Understanding quality of life among persons with disabilities in Canada: Material and social well-being

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Understanding quality of life among persons with disabilities in Canada: Material and social well-being

by Sharanjit Uppal and Diana Simionescu

Overview of the study

Using data from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, this study summarizes selected quality of life indicators among persons with disabilities in Canada. Indicators were selected to capture a wide scope of material and social well-being—namely, being in core housing need, experiencing food insecurity, being housebound and experiencing loneliness.

- In 2022, 11% of persons with disabilities lived in households that were in core housing need, down from 16% in 2017, the last time the survey was conducted.
- In 2022, almost one-third (31%) of persons with disabilities in Canada lived in households that experienced moderate or severe food insecurity. This proportion was notably higher among those with very severe disabilities (44%).
- Beyond material deprivation, persons with disabilities were also at risk of experiencing social isolation. For example, more than 1 in 10 persons with disabilities (12%) reported being housebound because of their condition. The most frequently cited reasons for being housebound were experiencing fluctuation in their condition or health problem (60%) or aggravation of their condition or health problem when outside the home (59%).
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of persons with disabilities reported being lonely, with women (67%) reporting higher rates of loneliness than men (60%). Loneliness was also more prevalent among persons with severe (71%) and very severe (78%) disabilities.

Introduction

In 2022, 8.0 million Canadians (or 27% of those aged 15 and older) reported that they had one or more disabilities that limited them in their daily activities, up from 6.2 million (or 22%) in 2017, the last time the survey was conducted. Some of this increase is related, in part, to the aging of the Canadian population.^{1,2} As the Canadian population continues to age, the number of persons with disabilities is expected to continue to grow, highlighting the importance of understanding the lived experiences and the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Quality of life is increasingly understood as a multidimensional concept. Among persons with disabilities, it encompasses not only health status but also the material, social and environmental conditions that support full participation in society.³ It is shaped by the interaction between an individual's physical, mental and social functioning and broader factors such as housing, economic resources, community participation and social relationships.⁴

This article explores four indicators from the [Quality of Life Framework](#) that are relevant to the lived experiences of persons with disabilities in Canada: being in core housing need, experiencing food insecurity, being housebound and experiencing loneliness (see the [Data sources, methods and definitions](#) section). Core housing need and food insecurity capture dimensions of material well-being, being housebound reflects restrictions in mobility and social participation, and loneliness reflects self-perceived deficits in social connectedness and belonging. Although these outcomes are often studied separately, they frequently coexist and may contribute to cumulative disadvantage among persons with disabilities.

Using data from the [Canadian Survey on Disability](#), this article expands on the existing literature by considering these diverse outcomes together to

provide a more comprehensive understanding of the quality of life of persons with disabilities and the material and social conditions that jointly shape well-being.

More than 1 in 10 persons with disabilities lived in households that were in core housing need

In 2022, 11% of persons with disabilities lived in households that were in core housing need, meaning that their housing may be unaffordable, overcrowded or in need of major repairs⁵ (Table 1). For context, based on the [Canadian Housing Survey](#), the national percentage of the population in core housing need was similar in 2022 (9%). Notably, the percentage of persons with disabilities living in core housing need had decreased from 16% in 2017,⁶ with similar declines observed across levels of disability severity and demographic groups (e.g., men and women, racialized groups).

Core housing need varied by region, in part reflecting geographic differences in housing affordability, stock and economic situations. For example, 3 in 10 persons with disabilities living in Nunavut (30%) were in core housing need. In contrast, persons with disabilities living in Prince Edward Island (6%), Quebec (6%) and New Brunswick (7%) were the least likely to be in core housing need.

Low income was associated with living in core housing need, with almost half (46%) of persons with disabilities in the lowest income quintile⁷ living in core housing need. This proportion was close to 0% for the three highest income quintiles. Similarly, persons with disabilities living in owner-occupied housing were less likely to live in core housing need (5%) than those in renter households (23%).

Table 1
Core housing need and food insecurity among persons with disabilities in Canada, by selected characteristics, 2022

Selected characteristics	Core housing need		Moderate to severe food insecurity	
	percentage	predicted probability	percentage	predicted probability
All	10.7	...	30.9	...
Gender				
Men+ (ref.)	9.7	11.1	30.5	31.9
Women+	11.5*	10.5	31.2	30.1
Severity of disability				
Mild (ref.)	7.0	10.1	21.9	22.9
Moderate	10.1*	10.8	27.5*	28.1*
Severe	12.3*	10.4	37.5*	36.5*
Very severe	16.8*	11.5	44.4*	43.0*
Age group				
16 to 24 years	8.0*	8.8*	36.0*	34.9*
25 to 44 years (ref.)	11.4	12.2	40.6	42.0
45 to 64 years	10.7	12.4	34.6*	35.2*
65 to 84 years	10.8	9.6*	20.1*	19.9*
85 years and older	12.1	7.2*	11.0*	10.1*
Highest level of education				
Never attended school	14.7*	10.6	35.5	36.9
Less than high school diploma	15.5*	10.3	35.9	33.1
High school diploma or equivalent (ref.)	10.5	10.5	34.1	33.2
Trades, certificate or diploma below the bachelor level	9.9	11.0	32.2	32.3
University—bachelor's degree or higher	7.1*	11.4	19.6*	22.2*
Don't know or not stated	19.9*	11.0	40.7 ^E	35.4
Racialized population				
Non-racialized, non-Indigenous (ref.)	9.5	10.3	28.1	29.3
Racialized	15.3*	12.5	39.4*	35.9*
South Asian	17.6*	15.2*	34.5*	33.1
Chinese	11.0	11.6	26.3	33.7
Black	15.5*	10.1	57.9*	45.5*
Filipino	9.2	13.1	37.5*	35.2
All other racialized groups	17.5*	12.3	41.3*	33.7
Indigenous identity				
Indigenous	15.5*	11.7	46.1*	36.7*
First Nations people living off reserve	15.4*	10.1	53.8*	40.6*
Métis	14.5	12.4	40.2*	34.4
Inuk (Inuit)	22.1*	14.0	47.8*	28.2
Non-Indigenous (ref.)	10.5	10.7	30.0	30.5
Immigrant status				
Non-immigrant (ref.)	9.6	10.2	30.2	30.2
Established immigrant (immigrated in 2010 or earlier)	13.6*	12.0	30.0	32.5
Recent immigrant (immigrated from 2011 to 2021)	19.3*	14.1*	45.1*	36.3
Marital status				
Never married	14.1*	11.2*	40.9*	32.6*
Married or living common law (ref.)	4.8	7.4	24.2	27.8
Separated	31.8*	15.4*	48.4*	37.8*
Divorced	22.6*	14.2*	42.8*	40.1*
Widowed	18.0*	13.5*	21.8	29.9
Age of youngest child				
No children (ref.)	11.8	11.1	29.4	29.7
5 years and younger	12.4	9.6	39.4*	32.3
6 to 14 years	9.4	9.8	38.8*	35.1*
15 to 24 years	6.6*	9.5	32.0	32.4
25 years and older	4.9*	8.8	27.1	35.4*
2SLGBTQ+ identity				
Yes	14.3*	12.5	42.6*	34.6
No (ref.)	10.0	10.5	30.2	31.2

Table 1
Core housing need and food insecurity among persons with disabilities in Canada, by selected characteristics, 2022

Selected characteristics	Core housing need		Moderate to severe food insecurity	
	percentage	predicted probability	percentage	predicted probability
Income quintile				
Lowest (ref.)	45.6	39.5	47.5	40.6
Second	10.0*	9.6*	37.5*	35.6*
Third	0.4*	0.4*	29.5*	30.7*
Fourth	0.0*	0.0*	25.5*	27.5*
Highest	0.0*	0.0*	14.6*	18.6*
Homeownership				
Yes	5.1*	9.0*	...	...
No (ref.)	22.7	12.0	...	...
Core housing need by homeownership				
Homeowner not in core housing need (ref.)	...	...	22.3	27.1
Renter not in core housing need	...	...	42.8*	37.5*
Homeowner in core housing need	...	...	39.5*	28.0
Renter in core housing need	...	...	61.2*	40.2*
Rural or urban place of residence				
Rural area	7.1*	10.3	26.1*	30.2
Population centre (ref.)	11.5	10.8	31.8	31.0
Province or territory of residence				
Newfoundland and Labrador	9.0*	8.1*	39.3*	39.7*
Prince Edward Island	6.3*	6.0*	30.9	31.7
Nova Scotia	9.8*	8.7*	33.5	32.3
New Brunswick	6.7*	6.1*	37.0*	36.5*
Quebec	6.4*	5.4*	25.0*	24.6*
Ontario (ref.)	12.5	12.9	32.1	32.2
Manitoba	10.2*	9.5*	33.7	33.0
Saskatchewan	10.9	11.3	32.3	32.8
Alberta	9.8*	12.8	33.1	33.7
British Columbia	13.5	13.9	28.9*	29.3*
Yukon	14.7	25.6*	28.4	31.7
Northwest Territories	9.0	14.3	34.9	35.7
Nunavut	30.1*	41.2*	59.4*	47.3*

... not applicable

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Predicted probabilities are from estimating a logistic regression.

Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol.

Severity of disability is based on a global severity score calculated using various questions in the survey. It is important to note that the name assigned to each class is not a label or judgment concerning the person's level of disability.

2SLGBTQ+ refers to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals and those who use other terms related to gender or sexual diversity.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Nearly one in three persons with disabilities lived in households experiencing food insecurity in 2022

Food insecurity—another indicator of material deprivation—is an ongoing public health concern in Canada, as it is associated with chronic health conditions,⁸ mental health problems,⁹ and other diseases and infections.¹⁰ It has also been linked to premature mortality.¹¹ While recent studies have looked at food insecurity among persons with disabilities in Canada, they are limited because

the population with disabilities is based on either a randomly selected member of the household or the major income earner.¹² Moreover, certain characteristics were not considered because of small sample size or non-availability in the survey.

In 2022, nearly one in three persons with disabilities (31%) lived in households that experienced food insecurity (Table 1): 19% lived in households considered moderately food insecure and 12% in households considered severely food insecure. By comparison, the proportion of individuals in Canada in moderate to severe food insecurity was 17% in 2022, according to the [Canadian Income Survey](#).

Food insecurity varied regionally, possibly because of factors such as differences in average income, cost of living and inflation, among others. Overall, Nunavut (59%) had the highest proportion of persons with disabilities living in households experiencing food insecurity.

Severity of disability also played a role in experiencing food insecurity, with persons with higher severity levels being more likely to live in households that experienced food insecurity. Among persons with very severe disabilities, 44% reported household food insecurity—twice the proportion among those with mild disabilities (22%). This association was observed even after adjusting for other covariates, including household income.¹³

Finally, food insecurity was also more prevalent among certain groups, including Indigenous persons¹⁴ with disabilities (46%), particularly First Nations persons living off reserve (54%); racialized persons with disabilities (39%), particularly Black persons (58%); and persons with disabilities living in households with young children (39%).

Food insecurity was also associated with financial difficulty. In 2022, almost half (48%) of persons with disabilities in the lowest quintile of adjusted household income experienced food insecurity, while the proportion was 15% for those in the highest income quintile.¹⁵ Education is believed to be a protective factor against food insecurity, as it is linked to earning potential. Among persons with a disability, those with a high school diploma were more likely to live in households experiencing food insecurity (34%) than those with a university degree (20%). Food insecurity also varied by age: persons with disabilities aged 25 to 44 were twice as likely to be food insecure (41%) as their counterparts aged 65 to 84 (20%). Individuals in older age groups may be more likely than their younger counterparts to have a more stable source of income, such as a government pension.

Food insecurity has been associated with core housing need and homeownership.^{16,17} This relationship may reflect competing demands on household budgets and differences in financial security. Non-homeowners with disabilities who also lived in core housing need were the most likely group to experience food insecurity. For example, 61% of those in this group were food insecure, compared with 22% of homeowners with disabilities who were not in core housing need.

Almost one in four persons with very severe disabilities reported being housebound

While core housing need and food insecurity reflect economic challenges, a full picture of the well-being of persons with disabilities must also consider social indicators. Two such indicators are being housebound¹⁸ and feeling lonely.¹⁹ Individuals who are housebound are a vulnerable and often overlooked population facing complex health, social and environmental challenges that can significantly affect their quality of life. Previous studies have shown that being housebound is associated with poorer physical and mental health outcomes,^{20,21} increased social isolation,²² and reduced access to health care and support services,²³ all of which may have broader implications for individual well-being and population health.

In 2022, more than 1 in 10 persons with disabilities (12%) reported being housebound because of their condition—but this percentage increased to 39% among persons with very severe disabilities (Table 2).²⁴ Similarly, being housebound was more prevalent among older persons with disabilities. The oldest age group, persons aged 85 and older, had the highest rate of being housebound (19%), while the youngest age group, persons aged 16 to 24, was the least likely to report being housebound (9%).

Housebound status among persons with disabilities was strongly associated with socioeconomic circumstances. Those in the highest income quintile were less than half as likely to be housebound (8%) as those in the bottom quintile (19%), potentially reflecting greater access to supports such as attendants, transportation or other forms of assistance that facilitate participation outside the home.

Beyond socioeconomic factors, notable differences were observed across population groups. Inuit (28%)²⁵ and South Asian (19%) persons with disabilities were among the most likely to report being housebound, as were those who were divorced (17%), separated (16%) or widowed (17%), highlighting the potential role of social and support networks in enabling community participation.

Table 2

Being housebound or lonely among persons with disabilities in Canada, by selected characteristics, 2022

Selected characteristics	Often or always housebound		Lonely	
	percentage	predicted probability	percentage	predicted probability
All	12.4	...	63.9	...
Gender				
Men+ (ref.)	11.1	12.0	59.8	62.1
Women+	13.4*	12.7	66.9*	65.3*
Severity of disability				
Mild (ref.)	2.0	2.0	54.5	57.1
Moderate	6.3*	6.4*	63.1*	64.5*
Severe	14.6*	14.4*	70.8*	70.2*
Very severe	38.9*	38.0*	78.4*	73.9*
Age group				
16 to 24 years	9.0*	10.9*	80.6*	74.2
25 to 44 years (ref.)	12.9	16.4	73.0	71.4
45 to 64 years	13.6	12.5*	64.0*	65.8*
65 to 84 years	10.7*	9.7*	51.6*	54.2*
85 years and older	18.5*	13.3	55.5*	50.1*
Highest level of education				
Never attended school	12.2	9.6	64.5 ^E	62.5
Less than high school diploma	18.9*	14.1	62.4	58.8
High school diploma or equivalent (ref.)	13.5	13.3	64.6	61.8
Trades, certificate or diploma below the bachelor level	12.0	12.4	62.4	63.3
University—bachelor's degree or higher	8.1*	10.6*	66.5	69.9*
Don't know or not stated	14.8	9.7	58.3 ^E	52.2*
Racialized population				
Non-racialized, non-Indigenous (ref.)	11.8	12.3	62.8	64.3
Racialized	15.2*	13.4	69.6*	63.2
South Asian	18.5*	15.9	67.2 ^E	61.1
Chinese	5.6*	9.5	67.4 ^E	68.5
Black	16.6	11.2	70.9 ^E	61.7
Filipino	13.7	13.6	67.8 ^E	59.6
All other racialized groups	17.0*	14.4	72.5*	63.8
Indigenous identity				
Indigenous	13.1	11.0	67.2	59.4*
First Nations people living off reserve	15.7	12.8	67.9	55.6*
Métis	10.8	9.0	66.2	61.8
Inuk (Inuit)	28.1*	26.5*	70.0	64.3
Non-Indigenous (ref.)	12.3	12.5	63.7	64.1
Immigrant status				
Non-immigrant (ref.)	11.7	12.0	63.6	63.6
Established immigrant (immigrated in 2010 or earlier)	15.4*	13.6	62.3	63.9
Recent immigrant (immigrated from 2011 to 2021)	15.2	15.1	80.2*	74.2*
Marital status				
Never married	14.4*	13.5*	79.1*	71.6*
Married or living common law (ref.)	9.9	11.3	54.1	57.8
Separated	15.6*	12.0	77.7*	74.5*
Divorced	16.5*	14.7*	69.5*	69.6*
Widowed	17.2*	12.7	69.8*	76.1*
Age of youngest child				
No children (ref.)	12.2	12.1	64.9	64.4
5 years and younger	11.8	12.3	66.5	63.2
6 to 14 years	12.2	13.4	62.9	61.8
15 to 24 years	14.0	14.1	59.0*	62.3
25 years and older	13.6	11.9	57.5*	64.4
2SLGBTQ+ identity				
Yes	13.9	13.4	83.6*	74.2*
No (ref.)	12.0	12.1	61.6	63.0

Table 2

Being housebound or lonely among persons with disabilities in Canada, by selected characteristics, 2022

Selected characteristics	Often or always housebound		Lonely	
	percentage	predicted probability	percentage	predicted probability
Income quintile				
Lowest (ref.)	19.0	13.7	71.8	67.3
Second	14.2*	13.2	65.6*	64.7
Third	10.7*	11.9	63.1*	64.2
Fourth	10.9*	11.8	61.0*	62.2*
Highest	7.6*	10.6*	59.0*	62.0*
Core housing need by homeownership				
Homeowner not in core housing need (ref.)	...	...	59.2	64.1
Renter not in core housing need	...	...	72.0*	65.6
Homeowner in core housing need	...	...	71.4*	62.3
Renter in core housing need	...	...	74.1*	58.1
Accessibility barriers to social media or online chat forums				
Sometimes or never (ref.)	...	...	65.6	64.7
Often or always	...	...	87.6*	77.9*
Moderate to severe food insecurity				
Yes	...	...	79.4*	73.1*
No (ref.)	...	...	57.2	60.6
Often or always housebound				
Yes	...	...	88.0*	80.9*
No (ref.)	...	...	60.7	62.2
Rural or urban place of residence				
Rural area	10.7*	11.2	55.4*	61.0*
Population centre (ref.)	12.7	12.6	65.8	64.6
Province or territory of residence				
Newfoundland and Labrador	12.8	12.8	61.5*	61.8
Prince Edward Island	8.1*	8.7*	61.4*	63.8
Nova Scotia	12.2	11.8	64.9	65.2
New Brunswick	12.6	12.3	61.6*	62.3
Quebec	11.1*	12.7	58.5*	59.2*
Ontario (ref.)	14.4	13.3	65.5	64.7
Manitoba	10.8*	11.3	64.4	64.5
Saskatchewan	9.6*	10.4*	62.9	64.9
Alberta	9.6*	10.1*	65.1	65.3
British Columbia	11.6*	12.0	66.0	66.5
Yukon	7.7*	10.3	62.5	65.6
Northwest Territories	13.6	16.3	68.4	67.8
Nunavut	13.3	16.2	68.4	68.9

... not applicable

[†] use with caution

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

Notes: Predicted probabilities are from estimating a logistic regression.

Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol.

Severity of disability is based on a global severity score calculated using various questions in the survey. It is important to note that the name assigned to each class is not a label or judgment concerning the person's level of disability.

2SLGBTQ+ refers to Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals and those who use other terms related to gender or sexual diversity.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Fluctuation or aggravation of a health condition were the most common reasons for being housebound

Respondents who reported being housebound were asked about a range of possible reasons why they considered themselves to be housebound.²⁶ Among those who reported being often or always housebound, the most common reasons were their condition or health problem fluctuating (60%) or aggravating when outside the home (59%) (Chart 1). In addition, over half (52%) of those who reported being often or always housebound reported that mobility restrictions were a reason for being housebound.

Persons with severe or very severe disabilities were more likely to report specific reasons for being housebound. Almost 6 in 10 persons with severe or very severe disabilities (58%) reported mobility restrictions as a reason for being housebound, compared with 19% of those with mild or moderate disabilities.²⁷ Not having an attendant or companion to help was another important factor, reported by 23% of persons with severe or very severe disabilities, compared with 9% of persons with mild or moderate disabilities. Similarly, persons with severe or very severe disabilities (35%) were more than twice as likely to cite financial reasons as those with mild or moderate disabilities (17%).

Almost two in three persons with disabilities reported that they were lonely in 2022

In 2022, 64% of persons with disabilities reported being lonely (Table 2). The prevalence of loneliness is shaped by multiple factors, including limited social connections and support, such as relationships with family and friends; participation in organizations; and access to financial, practical and emotional assistance.²⁸ With far-reaching effects on personal well-being, loneliness has increasingly been recognized in recent years as a growing public health challenge.²⁹

Women with disabilities reported higher rates of loneliness (67%) than men (60%). Loneliness also

increased with the severity of disability. For example, 55% of persons with mild disabilities reported being lonely, while the percentage was higher among those with moderate (63%), severe (71%) and very severe (78%) disabilities. Other groups were more likely to report loneliness, including recent immigrants with disabilities (80%)³⁰ and persons with disabilities who are Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer or who use other terms related to gender or sexual diversity (2SLGBTQ+) (84%).

Persons with disabilities who often or always experienced barriers in using social media or online chat forums to interact with others were more likely to report loneliness than those who sometimes or never experienced such barriers (88% versus 66%). Online communication allows persons with disabilities to maintain friendships, participate in communities and build support networks, regardless of mobility, transportation or geographic barriers.³¹

Persons with disabilities who were food insecure reported higher levels of loneliness (79%) than those who were food secure (57%). This finding reflects those of recent studies that have documented associations between loneliness; social isolation; and other indicators of socioeconomic deprivation, such as food insecurity and housing hardship.³² The mechanisms underlying this association include reduced participation in social activities, stigma and chronic stress, all of which can diminish social engagement.

Lower housing quality and affordability have also been linked to a higher prevalence of loneliness;³³ however, the pathways linking housing need to loneliness are multifaceted. High housing costs can reduce disposable income available for social participation, while poor housing quality and overcrowding can limit opportunities for meaningful interaction or hosting social contacts. Although living in core housing need was associated with loneliness, this association was not observed after adjusting for other socioeconomic characteristics.

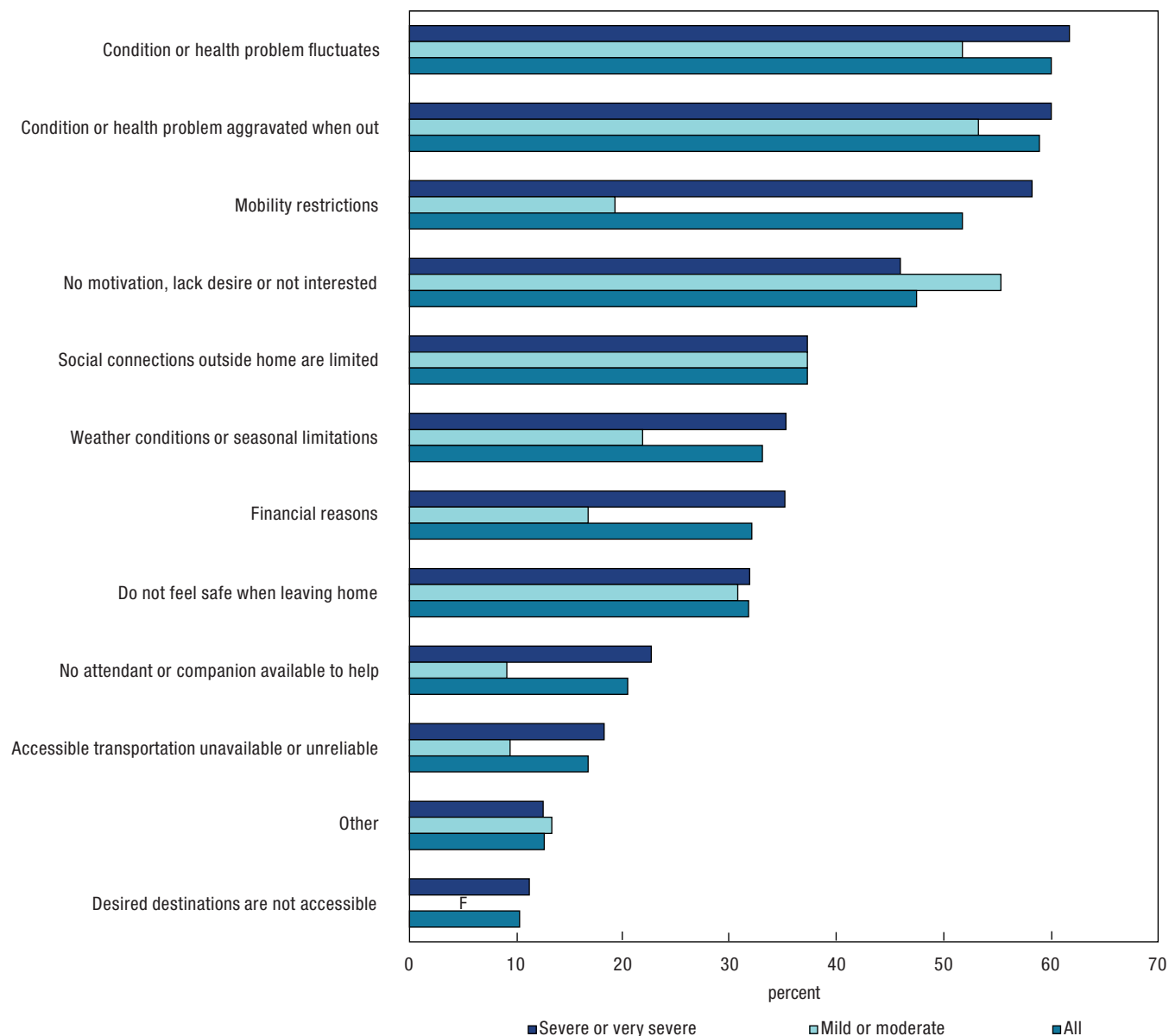
Finally, research shows that housebound individuals are at an elevated risk of social isolation and loneliness, driven primarily by limited opportunities for social engagement.³⁴ Housebound persons with disabilities (88%) were more likely to report being lonely than those who did not consider themselves to be housebound (61%).

Despite being more likely to be housebound, older persons with disabilities were less likely to report being lonely than their younger counterparts. For example, 52% of persons with disabilities aged 65 to 84 years and 56% of those aged 85 years and older

reported being lonely, compared with 73% of those aged 24 to 34. This U-shaped relationship between age and loneliness aligns with loneliness trends among the overall population.³⁵

Chart 1

Reasons for being often or always housebound, by severity of disability, 2022



F too unreliable to be published

Note: Severity of disability is based on a global severity score calculated using various questions in the survey. It is important to note that the name assigned to each class is not a label or judgment concerning the person's level of disability.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Conclusion

Using data from the Canadian Survey on Disability, this article examined selected quality of life indicators among persons with disabilities. Specifically, it looked at the association of personal and disability characteristics with being in core housing need, experiencing food insecurity, being housebound and experiencing loneliness and, where relevant, the intersections of these factors. Identifying these associations can help inform interventions aimed at supporting the full participation of persons with disabilities in society.

Across all four indicators in the study, some characteristics were consistently associated with poorer outcomes. In general, persons with more severe disabilities were more likely to experience

poorer material and social well-being outcomes. Similarly, persons with disabilities with lower income levels, with lower levels of education, or who were not married or living common law were more likely to experience food insecurity, be in core housing need, or report being housebound or lonely. Several factors may underlie these associations. For example, higher income may be protective against poorer well-being, because it allows greater access to social opportunities and higher-quality housing and neighbourhoods, factors that in turn are associated with lower rates of being housebound and experiencing loneliness.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

This article is based on data from the 2022 [Canadian Survey on Disability \(CSD\)](#). The CSD is the official source of data about persons with disabilities in Canada,³⁶ and it includes a full disability screening module, along with personal and disability characteristics.³⁷ The population covered by the CSD consists of all persons aged 15 and older as of Census Day who reported a difficulty or long-term condition in response to the activities of daily living (ADL) question on the Census of Population long-form questionnaire. The ADL is a multi-step question with six parts and is asked of persons living in private dwellings in the 10 provinces and three territories. Persons living on First Nations reserves are excluded, as are those living in collective dwellings, such as institutional residences and Canadian Armed Forces bases. The target population for the CSD corresponds to a subset of the covered population, namely persons who reported being limited in their daily activities because of a disability on the CSD. The survey is sponsored by Employment and Social Development Canada.³⁸

Methods

The study used logistic regression models to evaluate the association between four separate measures of quality of life (defined below) and the following personal characteristics: gender, age group, severity of disability,

educational attainment, income quintile, marital status, presence of children in the household, racialized group, immigrant status, Indigenous identity, 2SLGBTQ+ identity (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals and those who use other terms related to gender and sexual diversity), homeownership, rural or urban place of residence, and province. Income quintiles were calculated using the after-tax household income, divided by the square root of household size.

Definitions

Quality of life measures

Core housing need: A household is in core housing need if its housing fails to meet at least one of the three standards established for housing adequacy, suitability and affordability, and if its income before taxes is at or below the appropriate threshold specific to its community and the number of bedrooms.

Moderate or severe food insecurity: In the CSD, households are classified as being either food secure, moderately food insecure or severely food insecure. This is a derived variable in the survey based on a series of questions related to running out of food or having a limited selection of food because of a lack of money, compromising on the quality or quantity of food because of a lack of money, and skipping meals because of a lack of money.

Housebound: In the survey, respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be housebound, based on the following definition: “You are considered housebound when you are unable to leave your home environment due to your condition. Exclude being housebound due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions imposed by government or public health officials.” The available responses were “no,” “rarely,” “sometimes,”

“often” and “always.” In this article, respondents who reported being housebound often or always were classified as housebound.

Loneliness: Loneliness is a derived variable based on questions related to lacking companionship, feeling left out and feeling isolated from others. These questions were not asked of respondents who were interviewed by proxy.

Notes

1. Public Health Agency of Canada, 2020.
2. The disability rate has also increased among the younger Canadian population in recent years. For example, among youth aged 15 to 24, it increased from 13% in 2017 to 20% in 2022 (Hébert et al., 2024).
3. World Health Organization, 2001.
4. This definition is consistent with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health and social determinants of health frameworks.
5. Accessible and adequate housing is critical to enabling independent living for persons with disabilities. In this context, one important housing indicator is core housing need. A household is considered to be in core housing need if its housing fails to meet at least one of the established housing standards of adequacy, suitability or affordability, and if its before-tax income is at or below the appropriate threshold specific to its community and the number of bedrooms.
6. A similar decrease was observed among the overall Canadian population. The effect of temporary COVID-19 benefits on household incomes is cited as a key contributor to this decrease (Statistics Canada, 2022).
7. Adjusted household income was calculated by dividing the after-tax household income by the square root of family size to account for economies of scale. Quintiles were calculated based on ranked adjusted household income.
8. Tait et al., 2018.
9. Jessiman-Perreault and McIntyre, 2017.
10. Cox et al., 2017.
11. Men et al., 2020.
12. Gupta et al., 2024; Uppal, 2023.
13. In addition to income, the other covariates included gender, age, level of education, marital status, presence of children, racialized group, immigrant status, Indigenous identity, 2SLGBTQ+ identity (Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals and those who use other terms related to gender and sexual diversity), core housing need by homeownership, rural or urban place of residence, and province or territory.
14. Systemic barriers to employment and education, racial discrimination in the workplace and housing market, and the intergenerational effects of colonization and residential school experiences have created conditions of poverty among the Indigenous population, which in turn lead to food insecurity.
15. Being in the highest income quintile and experiencing food insecurity has also been observed in the overall Canadian population (Uppal, 2023). Even higher-income households can experience financial strain if they face large debt obligations. Moreover, income quintiles are based on national-level data, and living costs vary across regions.
16. Montcho and Al-Azzam, 2026.
17. Uppal, 2023; Fafard St-Germain and Tarasuk, 2020.
18. Persons with disabilities are considered to be housebound if they are unable to leave their home environment because of their condition.
19. Loneliness implies lacking companionship, feeling left out or feeling isolated from others.
20. Musich et al., 2015.
21. Tanner et al., 2014.
22. Cudjoe et al., 2022.
23. Musich et al., 2015.

24. In this analysis, respondents who considered themselves housebound either “often” or “always” were grouped together and categorized as “housebound” to better understand the lived experiences of persons with disabilities who face more frequent or severe limitations on leaving their homes because of their condition.
25. This may result from the interaction of disability with geography, housing, climate and service systems.
26. Respondents could choose more than one reason.
27. Because of small sample sizes, severity levels were collapsed into two categories: “mild or moderate” and “severe or very severe.”
28. Mithen et al., 2015.
29. Cacioppo and Cacioppo, 2018.
30. For a detailed analysis of differences in rates of loneliness among the immigrant and Canadian-born populations, see Karpinski et al., 2026.
31. See, for example, Duplaga and Szulc, 2019.
32. Karpinski et al., 2026; Park and Berkowitz, 2024.
33. Waldegrave et al., 2022.
34. Ezeokonkwo et al., 2021.
35. World Health Organization Commission on Social Connection, 2025.
36. For Indigenous persons, the [Indigenous Peoples Survey](#) is also an official source of disability data.
37. For prevalence of disability in Canada, see Hébert et al., 2024.
38. Detailed information on the survey and the questionnaire is available at [Canadian Survey on Disability \(CSD\)](#).

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