



COVID-19 DISABILITY SURVEY

Report for Data Collected up to
September 8th, 2021



Canadian Disability Participation Project
Le projet canadien sur la participation sociale
des personnes en situation de handicap

STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTIONS

The COVID-19 Disability Survey is conducted by the Abilities Centre in partnership with Canadian Disability Participation Project researchers from The University of British Columbia and Queen's University.

Partner organizations include:

- Abilities Centre
- Canadian Disability Participation Project
- University of British Columbia
- Queen's University
- Rick Hansen Foundation
- Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance
- Canadian Labour Congress

Members of the COVID-19 Disability Survey Research Team include: Kathleen Martin Ginis (UBC), Cameron Gee (UBC), Femke Hoekstra (UBC), Amy Latimer-Cheung (Queen's University), Joan Ubeda-Colomer, Pinder DaSilva (Abilities Centre), Melanie Carrey (Abilities Centre), Stuart McReynolds (Abilities Centre), Tara Joy Knibbe (Abilities Centre), Meagan O'Neill (Abilities Centre), Emilie Michalovic (Abilities Centre), Mikaeli Cavell (Abilities Centre).

Individuals/groups who contributed additional questions to the survey: Jonathan Lai (Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance), Canadian Labour Congress, COVID-19 Disability Working Group for the British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, Rick Hansen Foundation.

The content of this report is created by Kathleen Martin Ginis, Cameron Gee, Femke Hoekstra, and Adrienne Sinden. The report is formatted by Sarah Tarpey (Abilities Centre). Wave Front Centre, Canadian Hearing Services, and Christine Deschênes contributed to the translation to Plain Language, ASL, and French respectively.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 Disability Survey is an on-going survey of the needs, well-being and health behaviours of Canadians with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery periods. The results provide information to assist government agencies and community organizations to develop and implement COVID-19 response strategies to meet the needs of people of all abilities.

This report summarizes responses from 708 people who completed the survey between December 19th 2020 and September 8th 2021. The survey was open to Canadian adults who identify as a person with a disability and adults who have a child or family member living with a disability. The survey was available in English, French, Plain Language, and American Sign Language (ASL). The sample includes persons with physical, sensory, learning, psychological, intellectual, and other impairments.

Key findings of the second COVID-19 Disability Survey:

Mental health and social isolation

The majority of respondents (78%) reported that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health. Among adults, 90% had a worse mental health score than average for the general population and 82% reported greater social isolation than the population average. Almost all children with disabilities (98%) scored worse on a measure of their peer relationships compared to a population average.

Unmet needs

The majority of respondents reported unmet needs around services that support mental health and alleviate social isolation. Specifically, over 60% reported that their needs are not being met for emotional counseling, peer support, access to recreation and leisure programs, and attendant care services.

Worries and stressors

Half of the respondents reported that they are “often or always” worried about finances, future plans, and friends and family. Adults with disabilities reported many other stressors and worries including access to vaccines, fear of catching the COVID-19 virus, becoming seriously ill, transportation safety and hygiene, and general anxiety over world issues.

Loss of employment

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 68% of respondents have had their work hours reduced, or they have been laid off or furloughed. This number has doubled since our first survey (34%). As Canadians with disabilities are already at greater risk of unemployment compared to Canadians without disabilities, ongoing reductions in work among this group are very concerning.

Health habits

Since the start of the pandemic, 59% of adults reported that they are doing less physical activity and 59% report worse eating habits. Of those who smoke, use cannabis or drink alcohol, roughly half (43% to 51%) reported increased use of these substances since the start of the pandemic. On a positive note, the proportion of adults meeting the World Health Organization’s adult physical activity guidelines has increased from the first survey (19%) to the second survey (32%).

Children with disabilities

Among children with disabilities, 63% are less physically active than before the pandemic and 47% have worse eating habits. The overall level of inactivity in this population is alarming; 56% percent do not do 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity on any day of the week.

Additional information about the survey as well as the data supporting this report are available via <https://osf.io/z4gr2/> or <https://abilitiescentre.org/disabilitysurvey>.



Key messages

- This report provides a snapshot of the ongoing negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of Canadians with disabilities.
- Mental health, social isolation, and employment are issues of serious concern.
- Access to services that can support mental health and reduce social isolation (counseling, peer support, recreation and leisure programs, attendant care) are a significant unmet need for people with disabilities and their families since the start of the pandemic.
- A majority of adults with disabilities are reporting reductions in their employment hours compared to pre-pandemic.
- Canadians with disabilities continue to report shifts to less healthy lifestyles.



Introduction

The COVID-19 Disability Survey is a special initiative to record the experiences, concerns and needs of Canadians with disabilities during the COVID-19 outbreak and recovery period. The survey's findings provide important information to help communities ensure that COVID-19 response strategies meet the needs of people of all abilities.

The COVID-19 Disability Survey is open for adults living with a disability or adults who have a child, family member or roommate living a disability in Canada. The survey includes questions about participants' COVID-19 related stressors and needs, well-being and lifestyle behaviours. Participants are invited to complete the survey at different time points to track changes in their needs, well-being, and lifestyle behaviours over time. The survey is available in English, French, Plain Language, and American Sign Language (ASL) via <http://www.disabilitysurvey.ca/>.

This interim report summarizes second iteration of the survey's findings. The 708 respondents filled out the survey for between December 19th 2020 and September 8th 2021. Some respondents had completed the first iteration of the survey. Additional information about the survey as well as the data supporting this report are available via <https://osf.io/z4gr2/>.

This report includes three parts. Part 1 outlines findings about adults living with a disability and adults who have a child, family member or roommate with a disability. Part 2 outlines findings about children with disabilities. Part 3 outlines the similarities and differences between iteration 1 and iteration 2 of the survey.

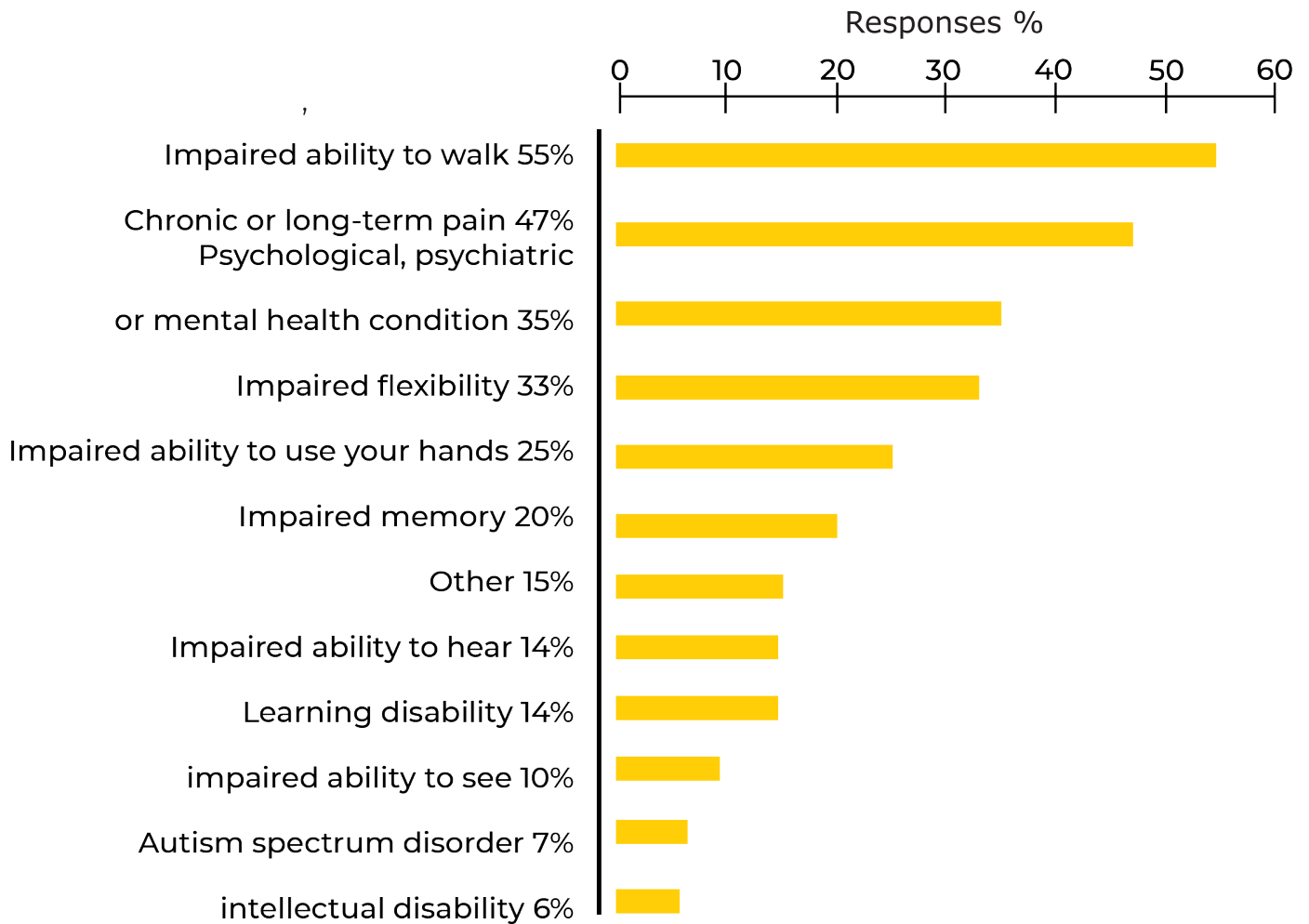
PART 1: Information about survey respondents

Demographics

A total of 708 respondents filled out the survey. Of this group, 74% identified as a person with a disability, 26% identified as a parent/caregiver of a child with a disability, and 23% identified as a person with a family member or roommate with a disability

65% of the respondents identified as women, 30% as men, and 5% preferred not to answer or reported another gender identity. Average age was 48 years; Range: 19-95 years

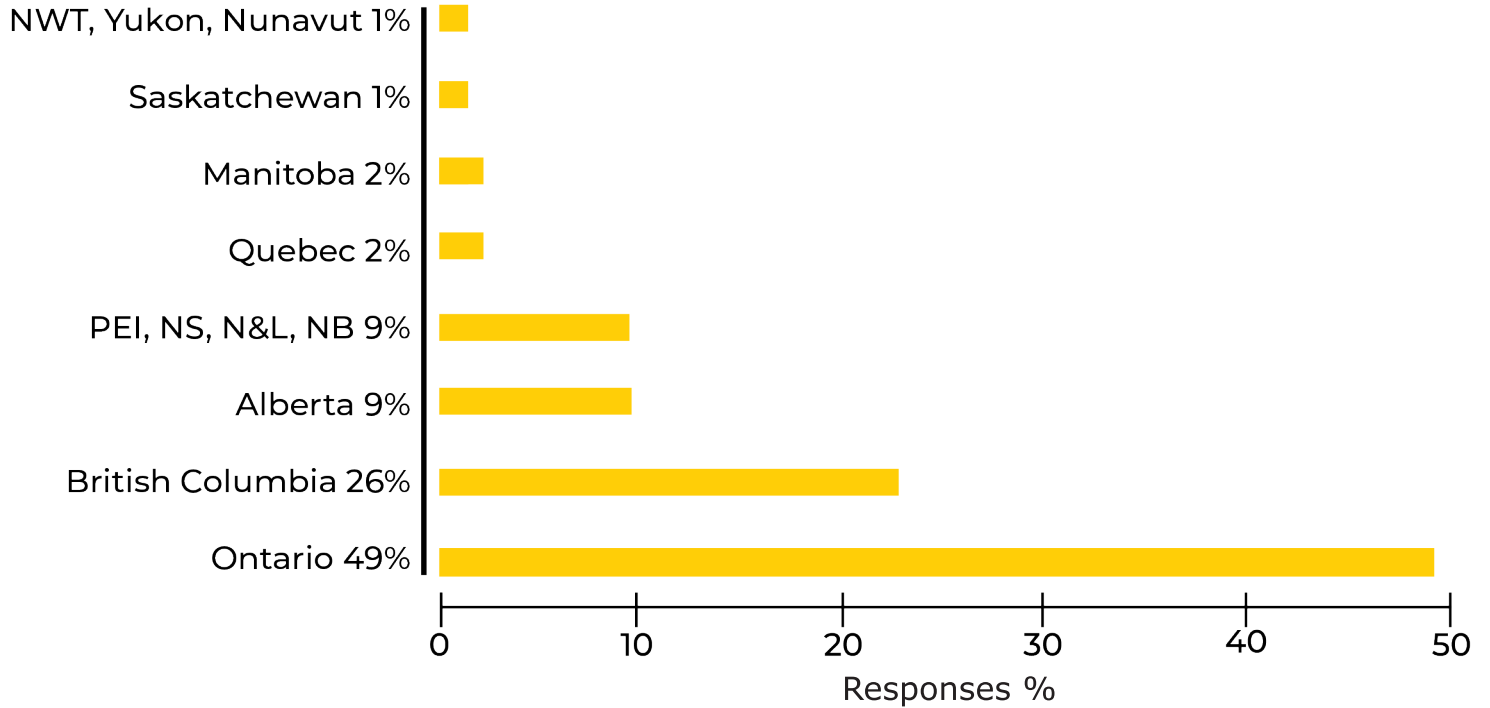
Types of disabilities reported by respondents



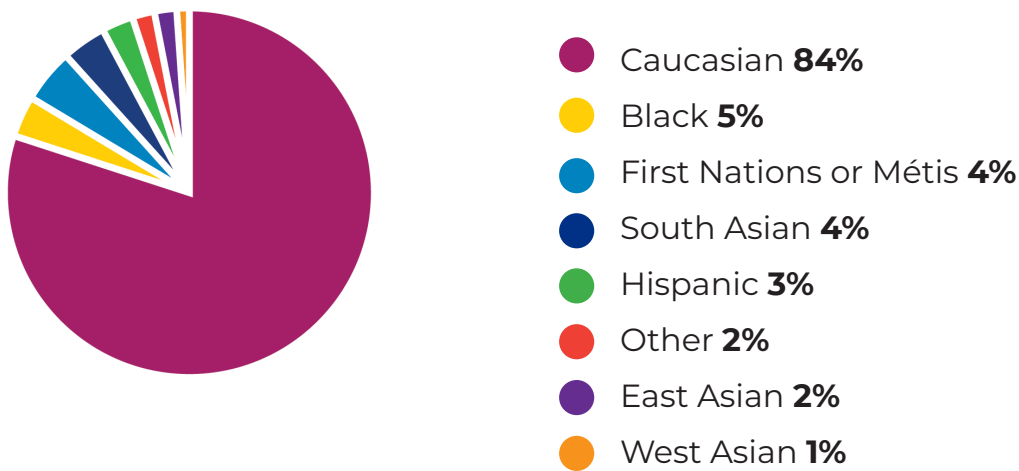
Examples of other impairments/conditions/disabilities reported:

- Brain injury
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Cancer
- Neurological disorders
- Multiple conditions

Province or territory of residence



Ethnicity



Highest level of education received



- University degree **29%**
- College or trade school degree **17%**
- Some college or trade school **16%**
- High school **13%**
- Some university **9%**
- Other **7%**
- Some high school **5%**
- Some college **4%**
- College degree **1%**

Marital status



- Never married **36%**
- Married or living as if married **34%**
- Divorced or separated **19%**
- Widowed **8%**
- Other **3%**

Total household income after taxes in last 12 months



- Under \$25,000 **39%**
- \$25,000 - 50,000 **21%**
- \$50,000 - 75,000 **11%**
- \$75,000 - 100,000 **8%**
- \$100,000 - 125,000 **3%**
- \$125,000 - 150,000 **2%**
- Over \$150,000 **4%**
- Decline to answer **8%**
- Dont know **3%**



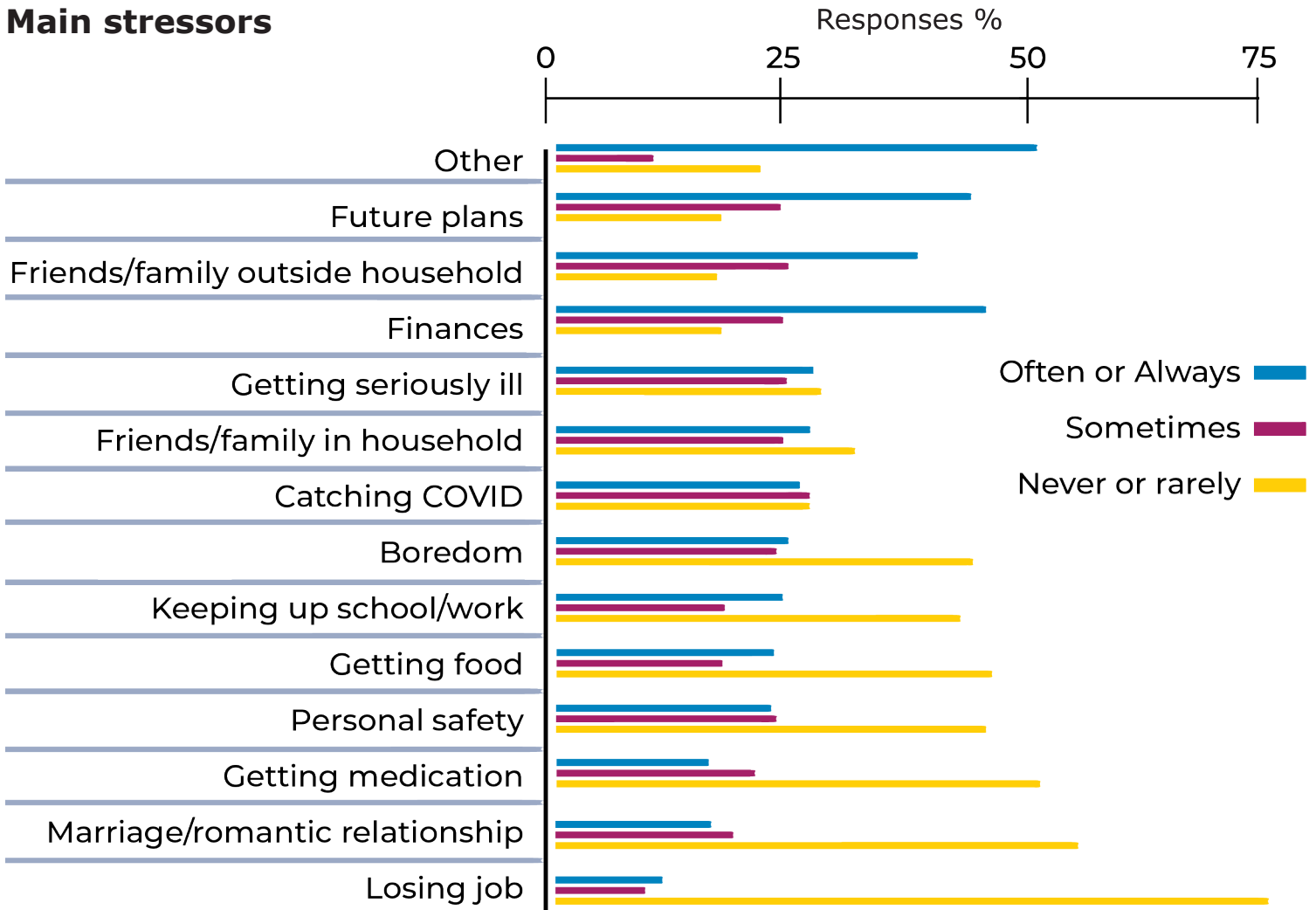
Impact of COVID-19 on employment



- No change **35%**
- Hours reduced **32%**
- Laid off **18%**
- Furloughed **15%**

65% of respondents reported that their employment status had changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. All of these respondents indicated that their hours had been reduced, or they had been laid off or furloughed.

Main stressors



Respondents indicated the extent to which they worried about different stressors. The most frequent worries were about future plans and finances. Close behind in frequency, the vast majority of respondents reported worrying at least 'sometimes' about catching the COVID-19 virus, friends and family, becoming seriously ill, boredom and getting food. Respondents also reported many other stressors and worries, such as:

- Access to services, medical support & care
- Housing/homelessness
- Loneliness, abandonment
- Social interactions
- Government support
- Death of loved ones
- General anxiety/world stability
- Transportation safety and hygiene



Other stressors or worries:



- “Vaccine availability and access”
- “When my under 18 year old son would be able to get the vaccine”
- “The mental health of my child and partner”



Needs and Unmet Needs of Canadians with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Abbreviations: G = Government; CO=Community Organizations; O=Others which may include friends, family, and/or neighbours.

Need	Respondents who have this need	Respondents with need who said it was met 'not at all' or 'very little'	Respondents who received support for this need during COVID	Main sources of support
Accessible housing	33%	46%	12%	G
Attendant care	23%	60%	11%	G
Income support	58%	54%	40%	G
Equipment/medical supplies/aids	38%	42%	11%	G
Transportation	31%	48%	14%	G,O
General health care	48%	43%	21%	G,CO,O
Emotional counselling	54%	65%	22%	G,CO,O
Peer support	39%	63%	14%	CO,O
Recreational and leisure programs	66%	69%	16%	G,CO,O
Access to food/shops/groceries	37%	54%	14%	CO,O
Internet and technology	29%	37%	10%	CO,O
Accessible media and websites	24%	34%	7%	-
Other	33%	56%	-	-

The first column of numbers in the table on the previous page shows the percentage of respondents who have each of the needs listed in the table.

The second column of numbers shows the percentage of respondents who said that these needs are not being met during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, a total of 6 needs were considered 'unmet' by over 50% of respondents. These unmet needs include: attendant care, income support, emotional counseling, peer support, recreation and leisure programs, and access to food/shops/groceries.

The third column of numbers shows the percentage of respondents who have received support for each need. The need that most respondents received support for was income support (40%), this was mainly support from the government.

Three of the greatest unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic – recreation and leisure programs, emotional counseling, and peer support – have been supported largely through community organizations and other (friends, families, neighbors). Over 60% of respondents considered these to be unmet needs. Only 14-22% of respondents who have these needs have received assistance.

Respondents have received assistance with three other unmet needs – attendant care, accessible housing, and equipment/medical supplies/aids – primarily through government support. Between 42% and 60% of respondents considered these to be unmet needs. However, only 11-12% of respondents with these needs have received support.

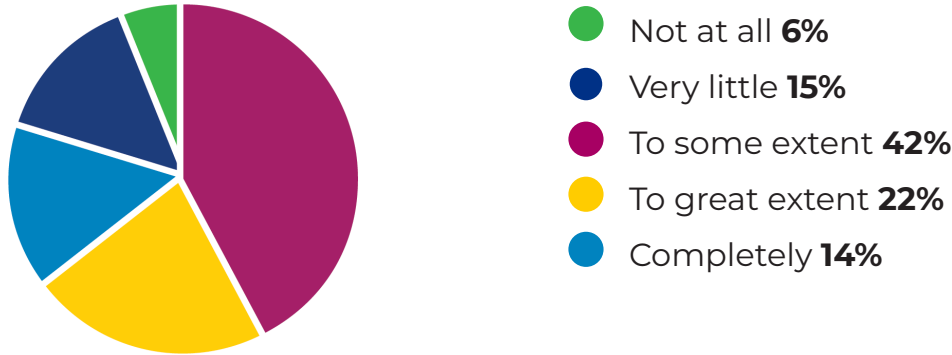
A majority of respondents (56%) had 'other' needs. Some examples of other needs include:

- Drug / medical coverage
- Government support
- Financial planning
- Delivery of food / grocery / medicine
- Supplies of clothing / cleaning products / proper PPE & other COVID-related materials
- Household chores and personal care support
- Support for children's needs

General impact on mental health

These results are from adults who identified as a person with a disability. Has the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted your mental health?

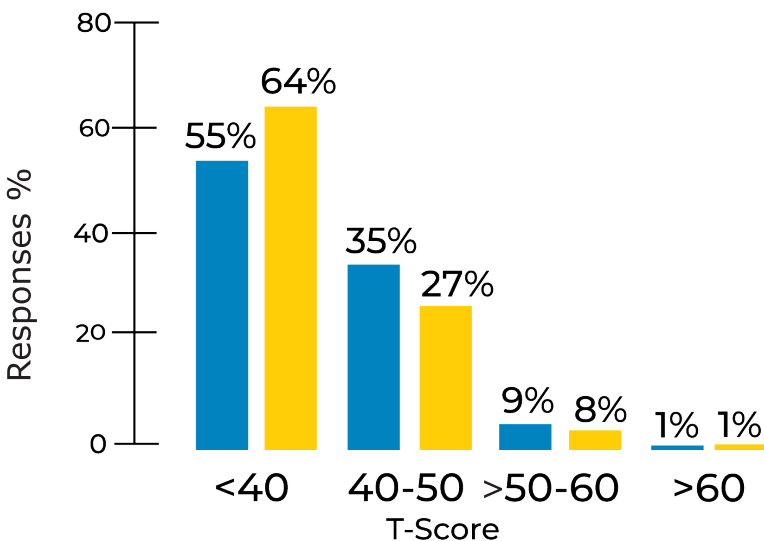
COVID Impact on mental health



The majority of respondents (78%) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.

- **Physical health**
- **Mental health**

Physical and mental health

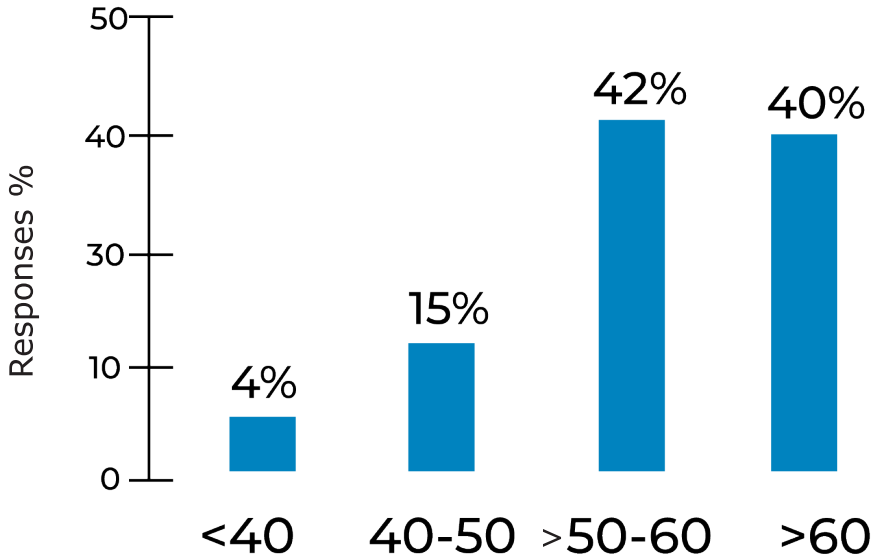


Almost all respondents (91%) report a physical health score below 'average'. 64% of the respondents report a score of 40 or lower indicating that their physical health is a standard deviation lower than the population average.

Concerning mental health, only 9% of the respondents report a mental health score above the U.S. 'average' and 91% report a score below 'average'.

Standardized questionnaires were used to measure respondents' physical health, mental health and social isolation. The scores are presented as t-scores; a score of 50 represents the mean score in a sample of individuals from the general population in the United States and 10 is the standard deviation. (Note that there are no population-based norms for this scale based on the Canadian population).

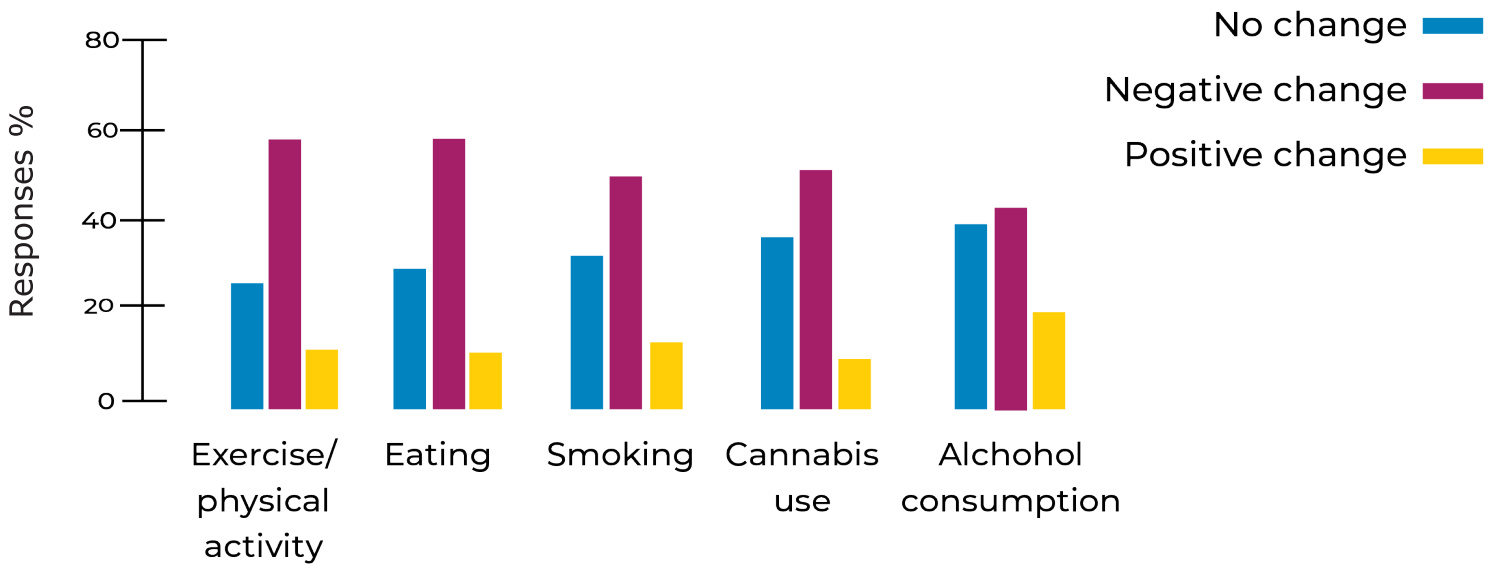
Social isolation



For the measure of social isolation, a higher score indicates greater social isolation. In this survey, 82% of respondents reported greater social isolation compared to the population average.

Lifestyle

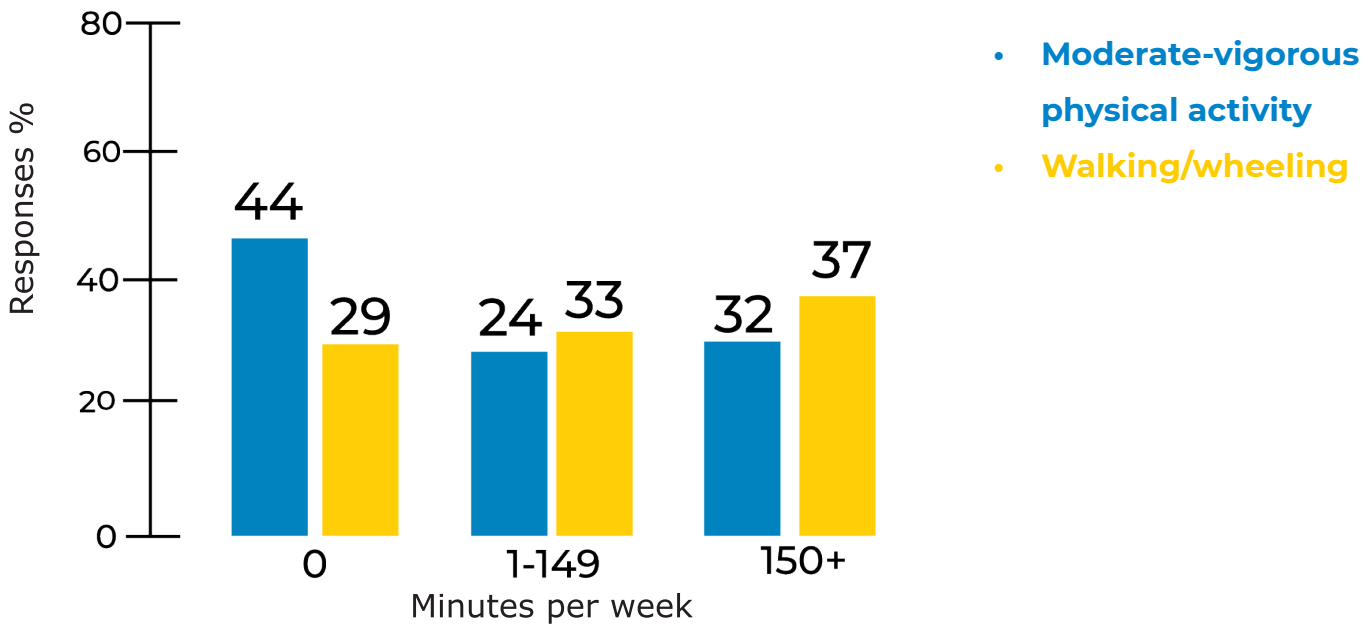
How have your health habits changed since the start of the pandemic?



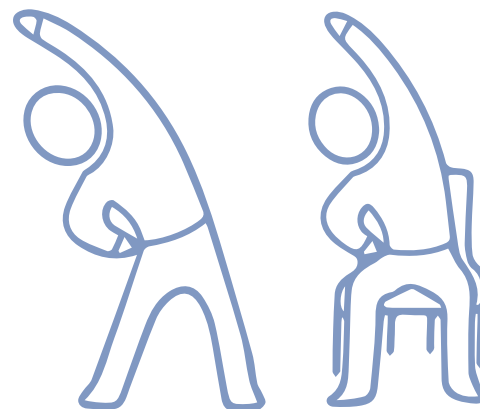
Note: only respondents who indicated that they are smokers, use cannabis, or use alcohol reported on changes in their use of these substances.

The Lifestyle chart illustrates the stark negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on health habits among individuals with disabilities. Almost 60% of respondents report that the pandemic has had a negative effect on physical activity and eating habits. The pandemic has had a further negative effect on respondents smoking (50% negative), cannabis use (51% negative), and alcohol consumption (43%).

Physical activity levels



The above figures reflect the stark negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical activity and other health habits among individuals with disabilities. 44% of survey respondents do not participate in any moderate to vigorous physical activity at all, whereas only 32% meet the recommendations of the World Health Organization that adults should engage in a minimum of 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each week. Though most respondents indicate that they engage in some walking/wheeling each week there remain 29% of respondents who do not.



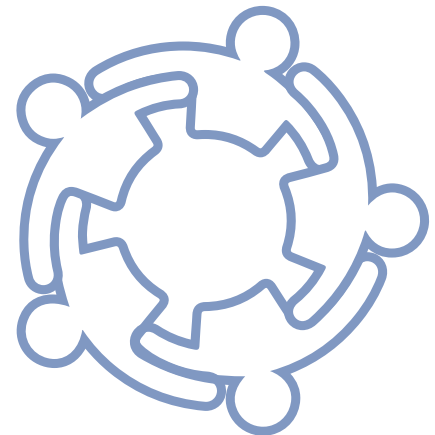
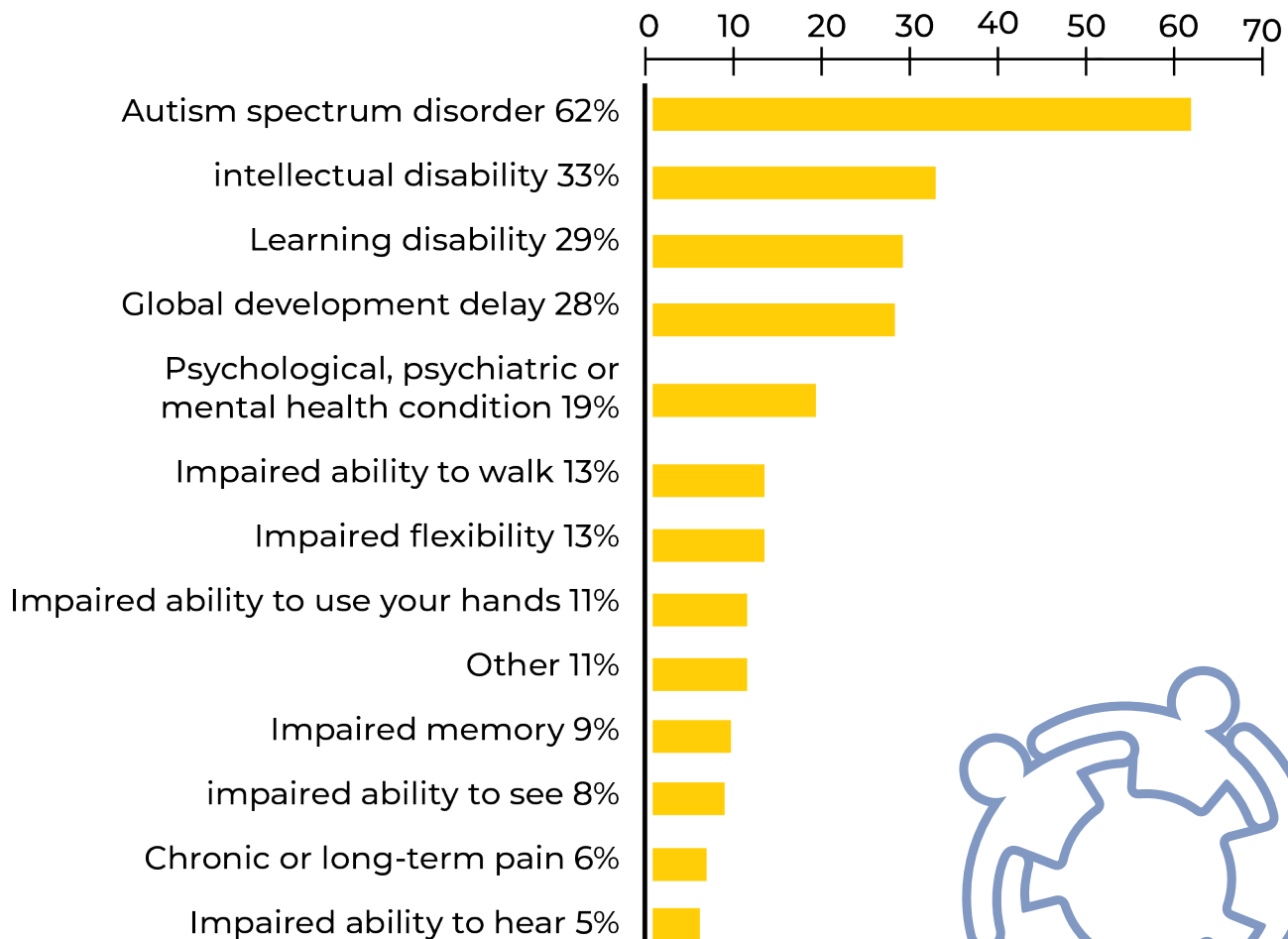
PART 2: Information about children with disabilities

Demographics of children with disabilities

The following information reflects survey data collected from 183 adults who identified as a parent/caregiver of a child with a disability. Children were identified as 61% boys and 39% girls. The average age of children was 16 years and ranged from 3-48 years.

Types of disabilities

Responses %

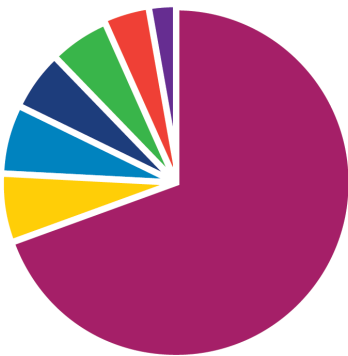


Examples of other disabilities reported:

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Neurological disorders
- Dwarfism
- Multiple conditions
- Seizures

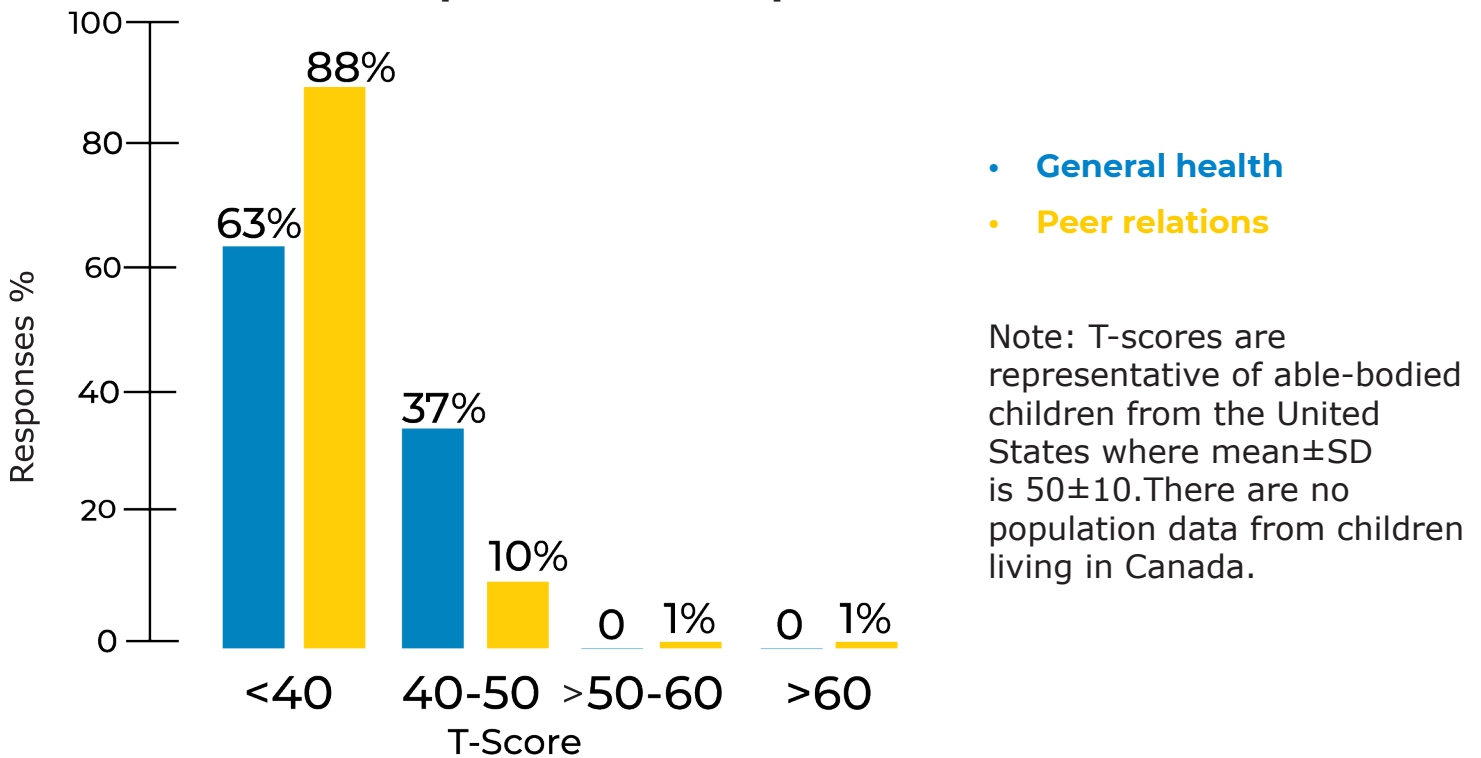


Ethnicity



- Caucasian **75%**
- Other **7%**
- East Asian **7%**
- South Asian **6%**
- First Nations or Métis **6%**
- Black **4%**
- Hispanic **3%**

General health and peer relationships

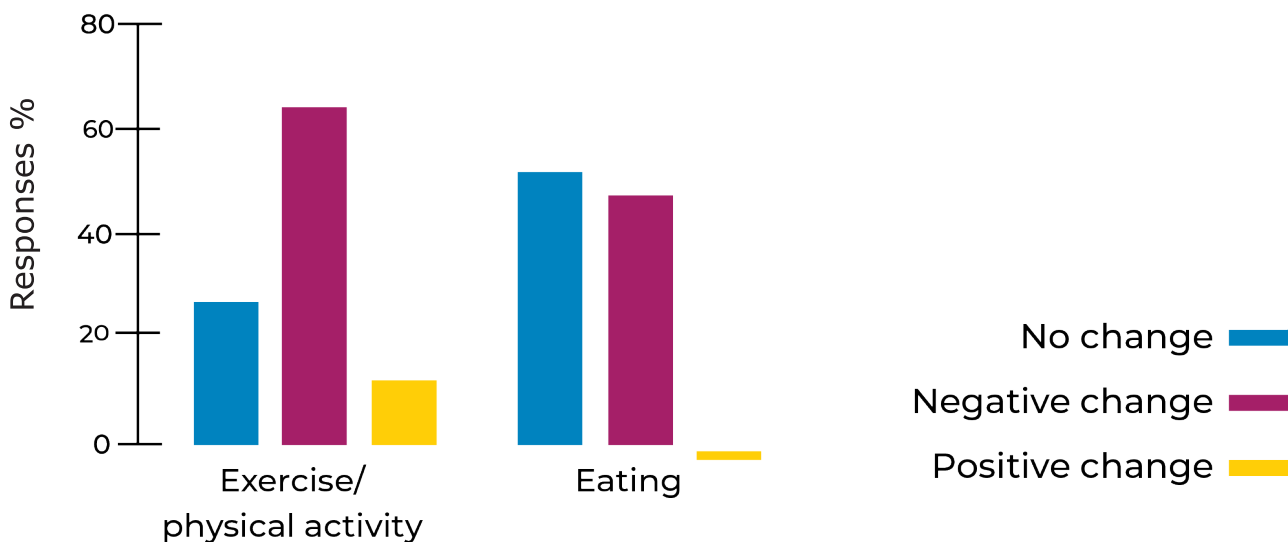


All respondents reported their child’s general health and peer relationship scores to be less than the population average. Furthermore, 63% of respondents reported their child’s health score to be below 40 indicating that their child’s general health is at least one standard deviation lower than the population average.

Similarly, the majority of respondents (88%) had a child’s peer relationship score below 40 indicating that their child’s peer relationships score is at least one standard deviation worse than the population average.

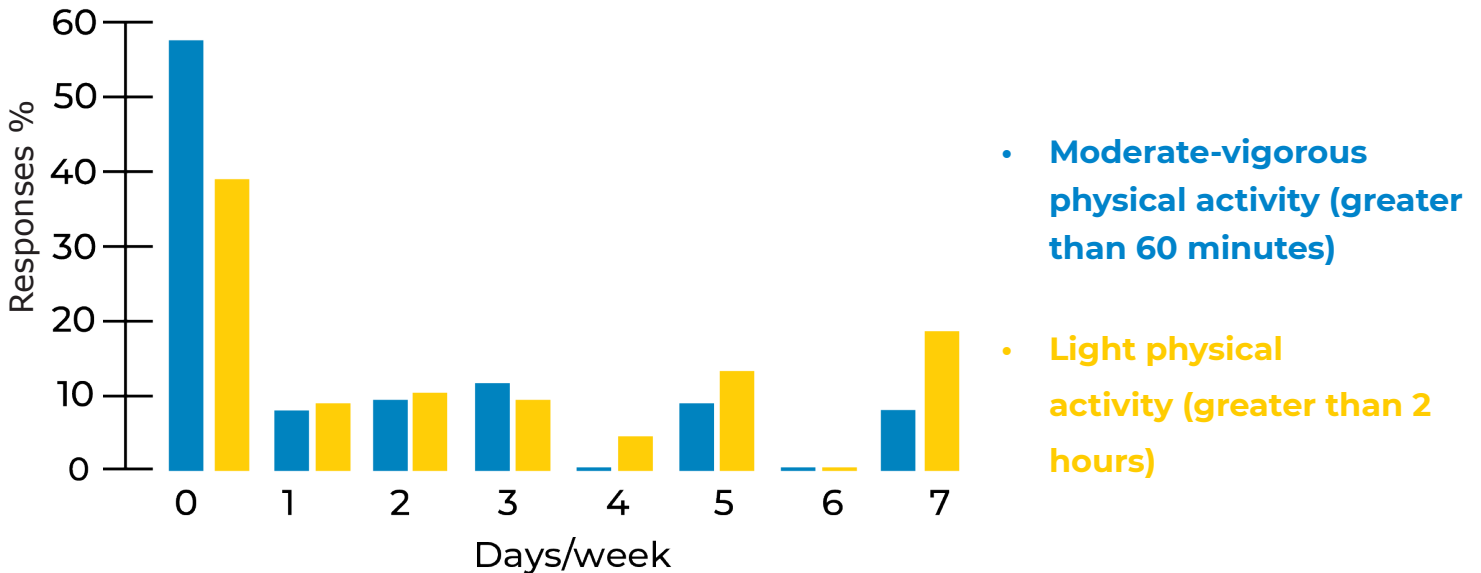
Lifestyle

How have your child’s health habits changed since the start of the pandemic?



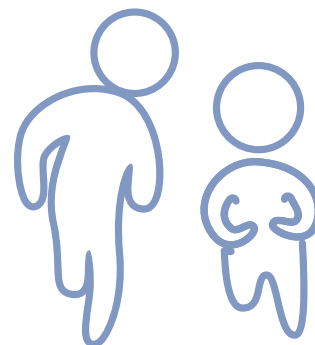
Similar to adult respondents, among parents of active children, over half reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to their child being less active. While the pandemic has not affected the diets of many children with disabilities, for those who it has affected, it has largely been for the worse.

On how many days each week did your child engage in moderate-vigorous physical activity for more than 60 minutes or light physical activity for 2 or more hours?



Among children with disabilities, over half do not achieve 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on any day and more than 83% do not do light intensity physical activity (e.g. walking or wheeling) for more than two hours each day. Only 7% of children with disabilities meet the World Health Recommendations of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on each day of the week.

Similar to adult respondents, among those children reported to participate in sport or exercise, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on exercise habits on ~60% of those surveyed. While the pandemic has not had an affect on eating habits among about half of children with disabilities, it has negatively affected the other half.



How does this report compare to the previous report?

Data presented in the previous report reflects survey responses received between June 18, 2020 and December 18, 2020. Data presented in this report reflects responses from December 19, 2020 to September 18, 2021.

Section 1A: Demographics

- The total number of respondents was similar (713 vs. 708).
- The number of respondents that identified as a man, woman, or preferred not to answer was similar.
- Average age was similar (49 vs. 48 years) as was the age range.
- Ethnic diversity of the sample was similar
- The most common reported impairments for both iterations were (1) walking limitation, (2) chronic pain, and (3) psychological, psychiatric, or mental health condition.
- ~40% of respondents to both surveys reported a total household income of under \$25,000 in the previous 12 months.

Section 1B: COVID-19 related stressors and needs

- Compared to the first survey, in the present survey, more respondents reported that their hours of work had been reduced (16% vs. 35%), or they had been laid off (12% vs. 18%), or furloughed (6% vs. 15%).
- The greatest unmet need remained access to leisure and recreation programs – 76% of iteration 1 and 69% of iteration 2 respondents who identified this need reported it was unmet.
- Compared to the first survey, in the present survey, fewer people reported unmet needs for access to medical supplies (58% vs. 42%) and transportation (61% vs. 48%).

Section 1C: General health and social isolation

- ~80% of respondents to both surveys reported that the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health.
- Compared to the first survey, a greater percentage of respondents in the current survey had a physical health score less than 40 (50% vs. 64%) but the percentage reporting worse physical health than average for the general population was similar.

Section 1D: Lifestyle

- Compared to the first survey, more respondents to the current survey reported their smoking habits got worse since the start of the pandemic (28% vs. 50%).
- More respondents to the present survey reported meeting the World Health Organization's guideline of 150 min/week of moderate to vigorous physical activity in the previous week (19% vs. 32%) and less reported doing no physical activity at all (59% vs. 44%).

Section 2A: Demographics of children with disabilities

- The present iteration included more responses from adults who identified as a parent/caregiver of a child with a disability (183 vs. 150).
- ~60% of children were boys and ~40% were girls.
- The average child's age was similar among reports (16 vs. 15).
- Ethnic diversity of the sample was similar
- The present report reflects data from a greater percentage of children with autism spectrum disorder (45% vs. 62%) and less with a learning disability (41% vs. 29%).

Section 2B: General health and social isolation

- A greater number of parents/caregivers reported peer relations scores less than 40/100 in the present report (76% vs. 88%). A score of 50 is average for the general population.

Section 2C: Lifestyle

- There remains a majority of respondents who indicate their child's physical activity habits have decreased since the start of the pandemic (66% vs. 63%). Over 50% of children continue to not achieve 60 minutes of physical activity on any day.
- Although 13% of respondents to the previous survey indicated improvements in dietary habits of their child since the start of the pandemic, 0% of respondents to the present survey indicated this.



The COVID-19 Disability Survey was developed by
Abilities Centre and The Canadian Disability Participation Project.

The following project partners contributed survey questions:

- Rick Hansen Foundation
- Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Association
- Canadian Labour Congress
- COVID-19 Disability Working Group for the British Columbia Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction