



# COVID-19 DISABILITY SURVEY

Report for Data Collected from  
September 19th, 2021 to April 11th, 2022



## 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). Christine Deschênes contributed to the French translation of the report, the Plain language version was prepared by Mikaeli Cavell and the Wave Front Centre, and the ASL version was prepared by Canadian Hearing Services.

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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 402 people who completed the survey between September 19th 2021 and April 11th 2022. 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 (76%) reported that the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health. Among adults, 87% had a worse mental health score than average for the general population and 79% 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 recreation and leisure programs and services that support mental health and alleviate social isolation. Specifically, over 70% reported that their needs are not being met for emotional counselling, peer support, and access to recreation and leisure programs.

### **Worries and stressors**

Half of the respondents reported that they are “often or always” worried about finances and future plans. Adults with disabilities reported many other stressors and worries including access to vaccines, fear of catching the COVID-19 virus, becoming seriously ill, concerns for friends and family, and keeping up with school/work.

### **Health habits**

The proportion of adults meeting the World Health Organization’s adult physical activity guidelines has increased from the first survey (19%) and the second survey (32%) to the third survey (37%).

### **Children with disabilities**

The overall level of inactivity in children with disabilities is alarming; 44% 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.
- Physical health, mental health, and social isolation are issues of serious concern.
- Access to services that can support mental health and reduce social isolation (counseling, peer support, recreation and leisure programs) are a significant unmet need for people with disabilities and their families since the start of the pandemic.
- Canadians with disabilities continue to report concerns around finances and future plans throughout the pandemic.



## 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 the survey's findings from 402 respondents who filled out the survey for the first time between September 19th, 2021, and April 11th, 2022. Additional information about the survey as well as the data supporting this report are available via <https://osf.io/z4gr2/>.

This report includes three main 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, 2, and 3 of the survey.

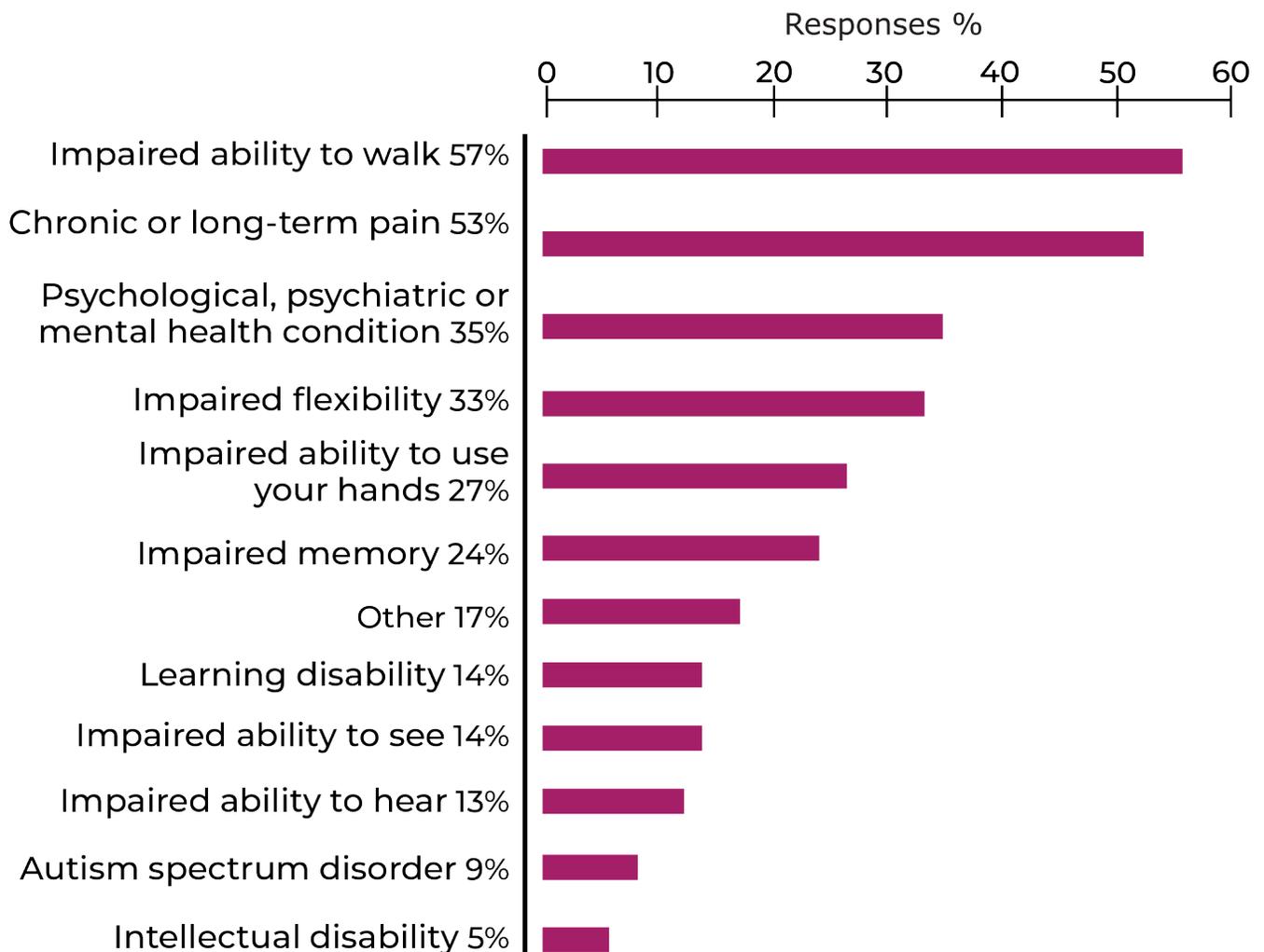
## PART 1: Information about survey respondents

### Demographics

A total of 402 respondents filled out the survey. Of this group, 83% identified as a person with a disability (n=332), 24% identified as a parent/caregiver of a child with a disability (n=96), and 23% identified as a person with a family member or roommate with a disability (n=91).

71% of the respondents identified as women, 24% as men, and 5% preferred not to answer or reported another gender identity. The average age was 48 years; Range: 22-92 years.

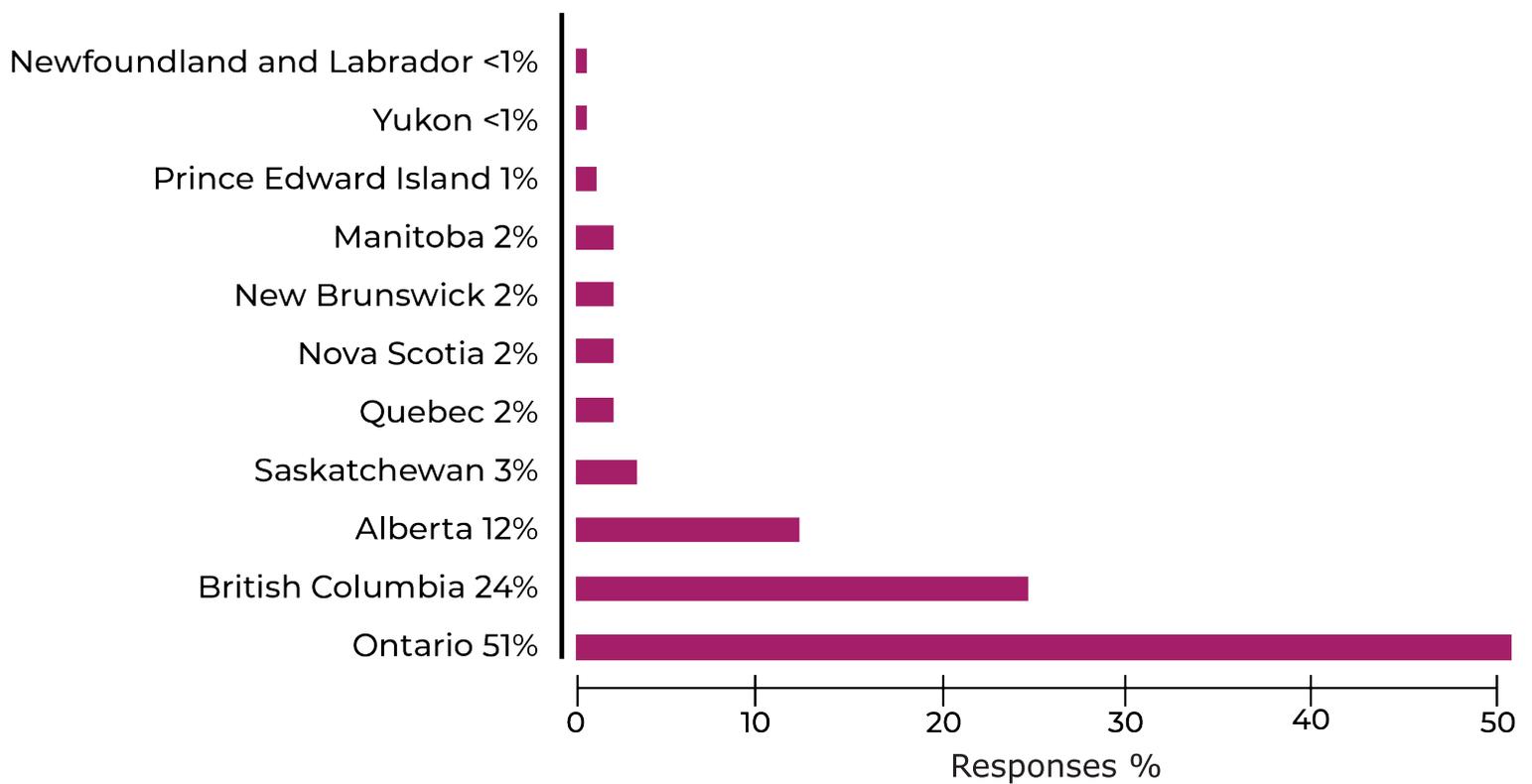
### Types of disabilities reported by respondents



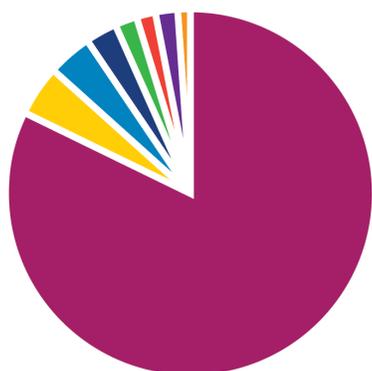
Examples of other impairments/conditions/disabilities reported:

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

**Province or territory of residence**

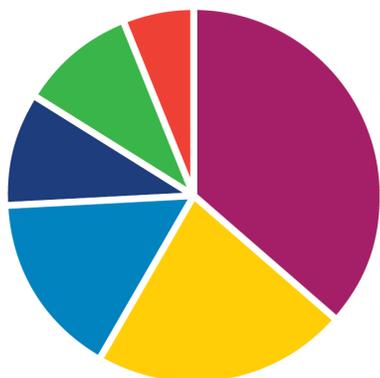


## Ethnicity



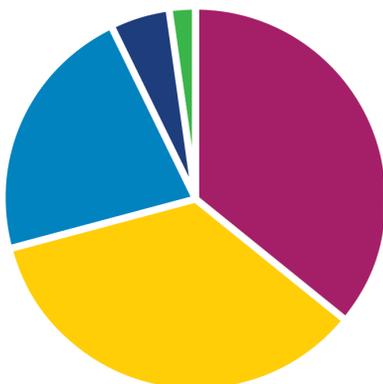
- Caucasian **88%**
- First Nations or Métis **5%**
- Other **4%**
- Black **3%**
- South Asian **2%**
- East Asian **2%**
- Hispanic **2%**
- West Asian **<1%**

## Highest level of education received



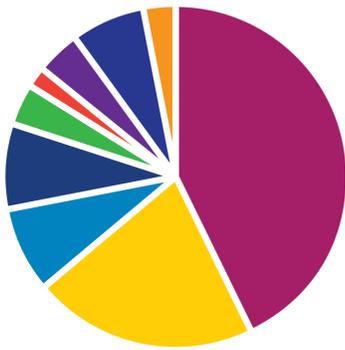
- University degree **37%**
- College or trade school degree **22%**
- Some college or trade school **16%**
- High school **10%**
- Some university **10%**
- Some high school **6%**

## Marital status



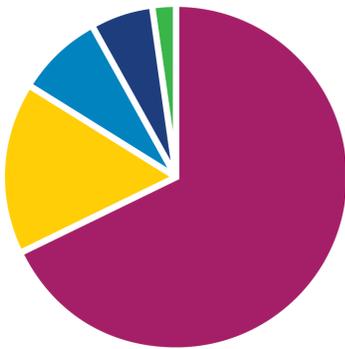
- Never married **36%**
- Married or living as if married **35%**
- Divorced or separated **22%**
- Widowed **5%**
- Other **2%**

## Total household income after taxes in last 12 months



- Under \$25,000 **43%**
- \$25,000 - 50,000 **21%**
- \$50,000 - 75,000 **8%**
- \$75,000 - 100,000 **8%**
- \$100,000 - 125,000 **4%**
- \$125,000 - 150,000 **2%**
- Over \$150,000 **4%**
- Decline to answer **7%**
- Dont know **3%**

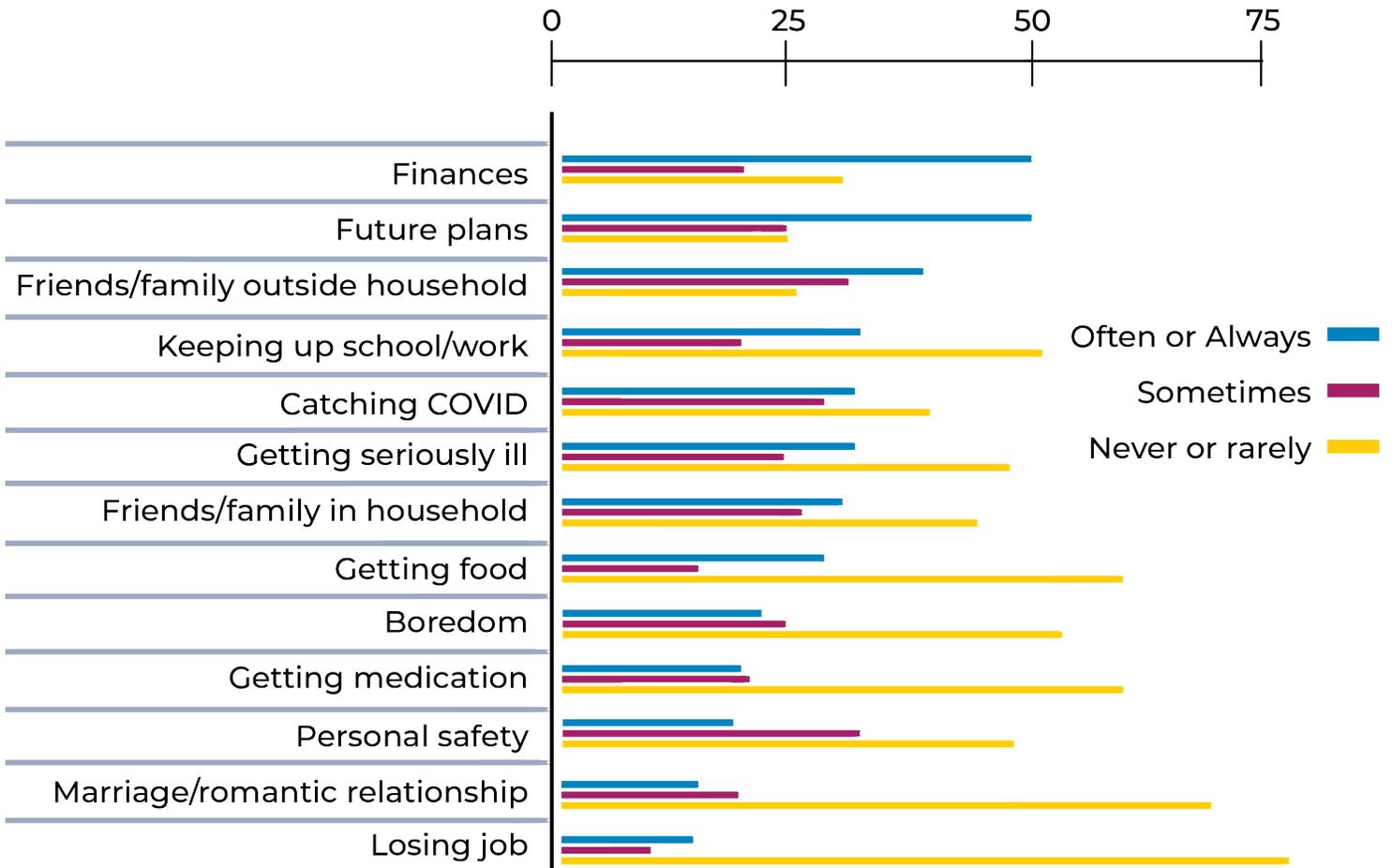
## Impact of COVID-19 on employment



- No change **68%**
- Yes (other reason) **16%**
- Laid off **8%**
- Hours reduced **6%**
- Furloughed **2%**

32% of respondents reported that their employment status had changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. 16% of 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

## 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	28%	<b>61%</b>	11%	CO,O
Attendant care	24%	<b>56%</b>	46%	G
Income support	<b>55%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>60%</b>	G
Equipment/medical supplies/aids	37%	50%	19%	G
Transportation	29%	<b>48%</b>	38%	O
General health care	48%	46%	42%	G
Emotional counselling	<b>51%</b>	<b>71%</b>	19%	CO,O
Peer support	36%	<b>70%</b>	29%	CO,O
Recreational and leisure programs	<b>57%</b>	<b>72%</b>	19%	G,CO,O
Access to food/shops/groceries	37%	<b>51%</b>	43%	O
Internet and technology	22%	<b>41%</b>	24%	O
Accessible media and websites	23%	34%	20%	CO,O
Other	15%	<b>78%</b>	-	-

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, 3 needs were considered 'unmet' by over 70% of respondents. These unmet needs include access to: emotional counselling, peer support, and recreation and leisure programs

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 (60%), this was mainly supported by the government.

The three of the greatest unmet needs during the COVID-19 pandemic – recreation and leisure programs, emotional counselling, and peer support – have been supported largely through community organizations and other (friends, families, neighbors). Over 70% of respondents considered these to be unmet needs. Only 19-29% of respondents who have these needs have received assistance.

Respondents have received assistance with three other unmet needs – accessible housing, attendant care, and income support – primarily through government support. Over 50% of respondents considered these to be unmet needs. However, only 11% of respondents with these needs have received support for accessible housing, whereas, 46% received support for attendant care.

A majority of respondents (78%) had 'other' needs. Some examples of other needs include:

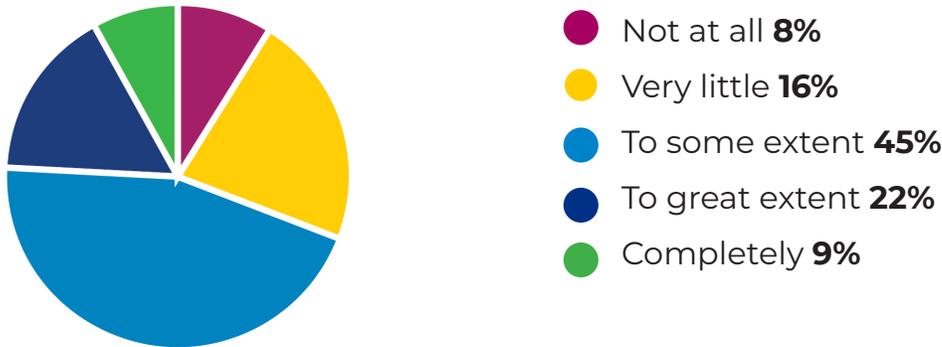
- Social interaction
- Help with pet care
- Financial security
- Respite care



## General impact on mental health

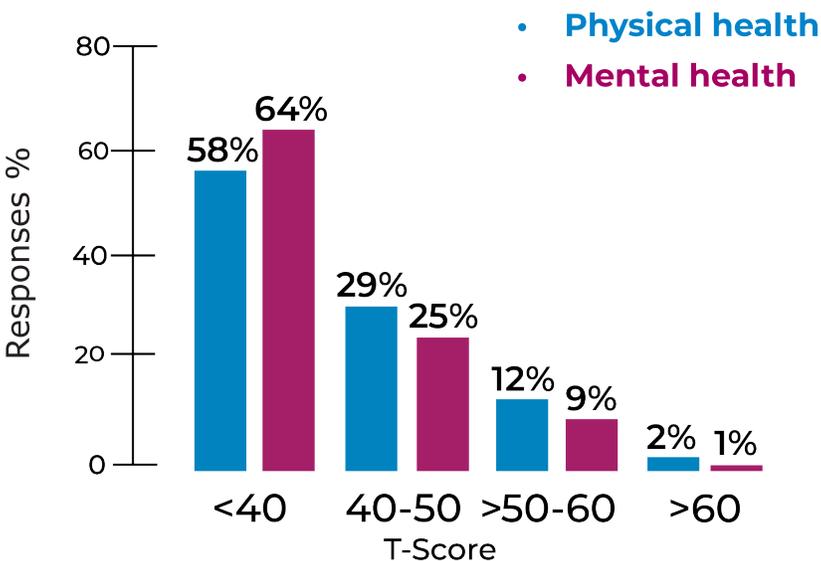
These results are from adults who identified as a person with a disability. Has the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted your mental health?

### COVID Impact on mental health



The majority of respondents (76%) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.

### Physical and mental health

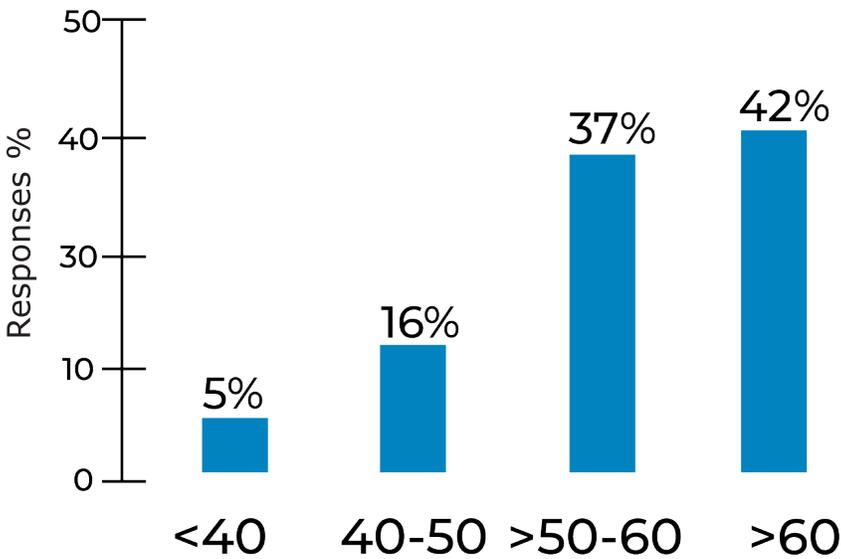


Almost all respondents (89%) report a physical health score below 'average'. 64% of the respondents report a score of 40 or lower indicating that their physical health is a standard deviation lower than the population average.

Concerning mental health, only 13% of the respondents report a mental health score above the U.S. 'average' and 87% report a score below 'average'.

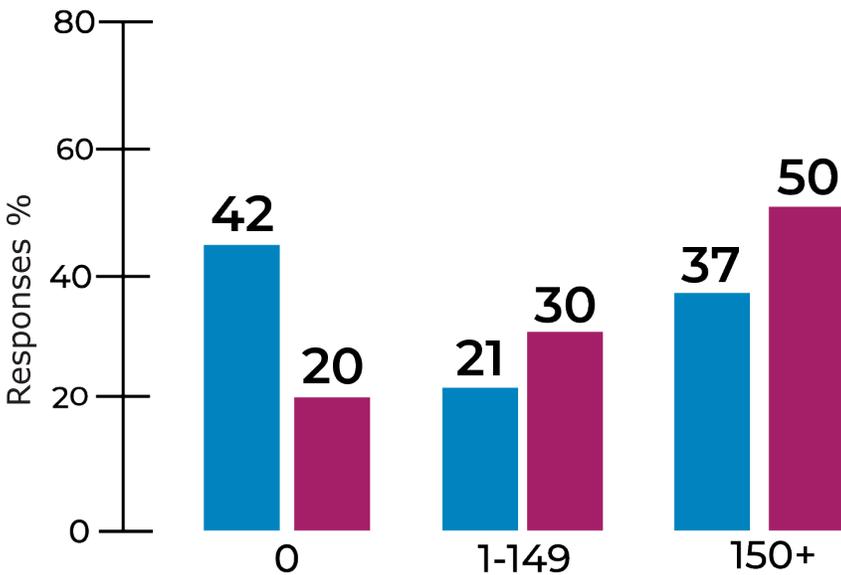
Standardized questionnaires were used to measure respondents' physical health, mental health and social isolation. The scores are presented as t-scores; a score of 50 represents the mean score in a sample of individuals from the general population in the United States and 10 is the standard deviation. (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, 79% of respondents reported greater social isolation compared to the population average.

### Physical activity levels



- Moderate-vigorous physical activity
- Walking/wheeling

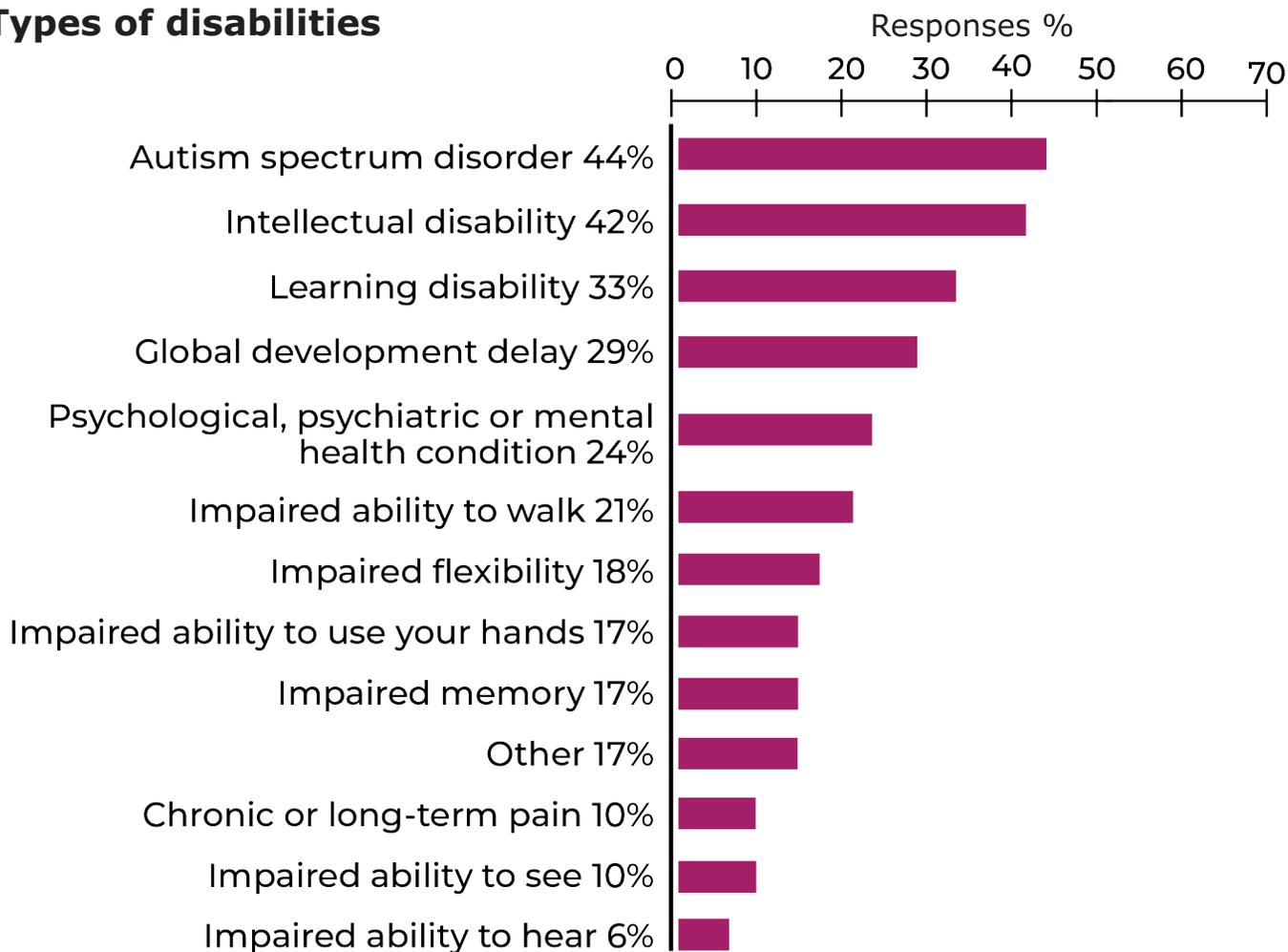
The above figures reflect the stark negative consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical activity and other health habits among individuals with disabilities. 42% of survey respondents do not participate in any moderate to vigorous physical activity at all, whereas only 37% meet the recommendations 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 20% 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 96 adults who identified as a parent/caregiver of a child with a disability. Children were identified as 65% boys and 34% girls, and 1% as non-binary. The average age of children was 17 years and ranged from 2-51 years.

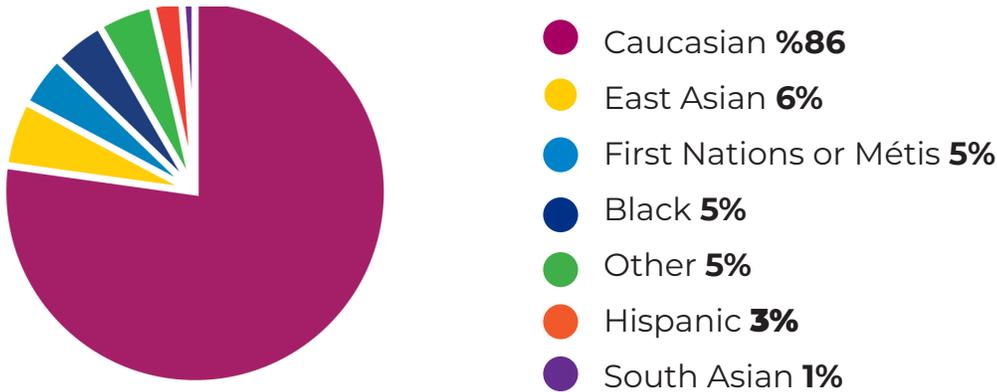
### Types of disabilities



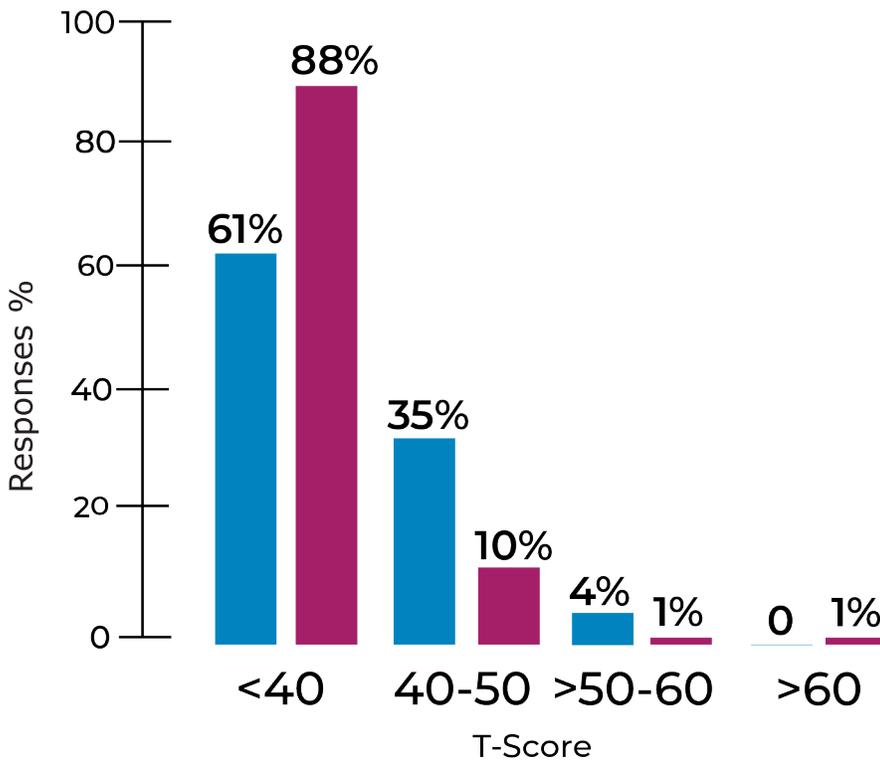
### Examples of other disabilities reported:

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Acquired brain injury
- Seizures
- Impaired ability to speak
- Down syndrome

## Ethnicity



## General health and peer relationships



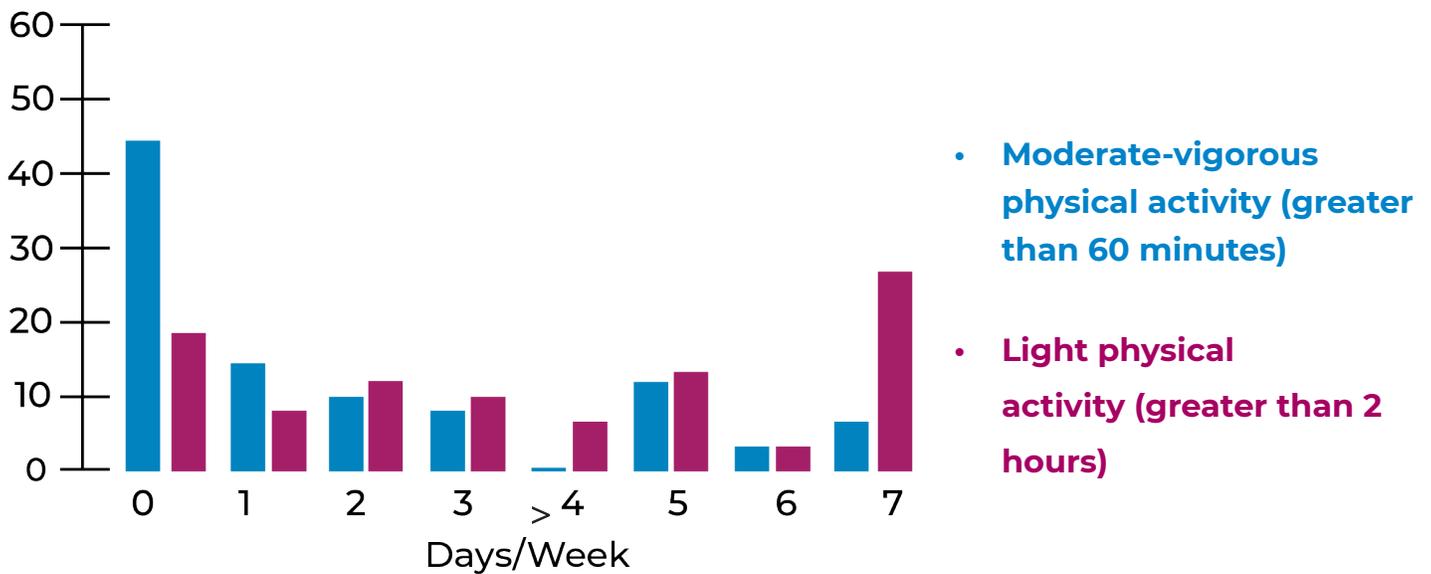
- General health
- Peer relations

Note: T-scores are representative of able-bodied children from the United States where mean±SD is 50±10. There are no population data from children living in Canada.

All respondents reported their child’s general health and peer relationship scores to be less than the population average. Furthermore, 61% 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.

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, 44% do not achieve 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on any day and 72% do not do light intensity physical activity (e.g. walking or wheeling) for more than two hours each day. Only 6% of children with disabilities meet the World Health Recommendations of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity on each day of the week.



## **PART 3: Comparison to previous report**

### **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 (i.e. Survey Report 1) and between December 19, 2020 to September 18, 2021 (i.e., Report 2). Data presented in this report reflects responses from September 19 and April 11, 2022 (i.e. Report 3).

#### **Section 1A: Demographics**

- The present report had fewer respondents than previous iterations (402 vs. 713 in iteration 1 and 708 in iteration 2).
- The number of respondents that identified as a man, woman, or preferred not to answer was similar.
- Average age was similar as was the age range (51 vs. 49 and 48 years).
- The most common reported impairments for all reports were (1) walking limitation, (2) chronic pain, and (3) psychological, psychiatric, or mental health condition.
- ~40% of respondents to all versions of the survey 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 previous iterations, in the present survey, fewer respondents reported that their hours of work had been reduced, they had been laid off, or furloughed during the pandemic.
- The greatest unmet need remained access to leisure and recreation programs (72% vs. 69% and 76%).
- From survey to survey, fewer respondents have reported access to medical supplies as an unmet need (58% vs. 42% vs. 34%).

#### **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.
- A similar percentage of respondents in the current survey had a physical health score less than 40 compared to report 2 (64% vs. 64%) and the percentage reporting worse physical health than average for the general population was similar (89% vs. 91%).
- A similar percentage of respondents in the current survey had a physical health score less than 40 compared to report 2 (64% vs. 64%) and the percentage reporting worse physical health than average for the general population was similar (89% vs. 91%).

## Section 1D: Lifestyle

- More respondents to the present survey reported meeting the World Health Organization's guideline of 150 min/week of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity in the previous week (37% vs. 19% and 32%) and less reported doing no physical activity at all (42% vs. 59% and 44%).
- More respondents to the present survey reported meeting the World Health Organization's guideline of 150 min/week of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity in the previous week (37% vs. 19% and 32%) and less reported doing no physical activity at all (42% vs. 59% and 44%).

## Section 2A: Demographics of children with disabilities

- The present report included fewer responses from adults who identified as a parent/caregiver of a child with a disability (96 vs. 183 and 150).
- In each iteration more children were identified as boys than girls.
- The child's average age was similar among reports (17 vs. 16 and 15).
- Similar to previous reports, the most common impairment is autism spectrum disorder (44% vs. 45% and 62%).

## Section 2B: General health and social isolation

- Similar to iteration 2, 88% of parents/caregivers scored their child's peer relationships to be <40. A score of 50 is average for the general population.

## Section 2C: Lifestyle

- In the present iteration, 44% report their child to have completed 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous physical activity on no days in the previous week, whereas in the previous iteration this number was 56%.



## COVID-19 Disability Survey

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