



# COVID-19 DISABILITY SURVEY

Report for Data Collected up to  
September 8th, 2021



cdpp

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

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**Who made the survey and this report?**

The survey was made by the Abilities Centre and their partners. These partners are from the Canadian Disability Participation Project. They work as researchers at The University of British Columbia and Queen's University.

**Here are the all the partners who also helped make the survey:**

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

**Here are the members of the COVID-19 Disability Survey Research Team who helped with the survey:**

- Kathleen Martin Ginis (University of British Columbia)
- Cameron Gee (University of British Columbia)
- Femke Hoekstra (University of British Columbia)
- Amy Latimer-Cheung (Queens University)
- Joan Úbeda-Colomer (University of British Columbia)
- 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)

**Here are the other people and groups who also helped with 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

**Here are the people who made this report:**

- Kathleen Martin Ginis
- Cameron Gee
- Femke Hoekstra

**Here are the people who designed how this report looks and did different versions:**

Wave Front Centre, Canadian Hearing Services, and Christine Deschênes contributed to the translation to Plain Language, ASL, and French respectively. The report is formatted by Sarah Tarpey (Abilities Centre).

**Contact Information**

Find out more about the survey at this website: [www.disabilitysurvey.ca/](http://www.disabilitysurvey.ca/)  
Email questions to this address: [disabilitysurvey@abilitiescentre.org](mailto:disabilitysurvey@abilitiescentre.org)





## Summary of this report

This report shows the results of a survey. The survey looks at how COVID-19 has changed the lives of people with disabilities. It tries to find out if their needs are being met. It tries to measure their well-being and health.

The results of this COVID-19 survey are useful. It will help COVID-19 planners make sure everybody's needs are met. It will help planners who look after dealing with the virus. It will help community groups. It will help government. It will help groups that work with people with disabilities. This will be good for all Canadians.

This report shows the responses from people who took the COVID-19 survey. This survey was for people who have a disability. It was also for their family members or caregivers. The survey was open for 9 months. It started on December 19th, 2020. It finished on September 8th, 2021.

People could do the survey in English, French, Plain Language, or American Sign Language. A diverse group of people did the survey. This included people with many different kinds of disabilities. A total of 708 people finished the survey.

In this report, the people who completed the survey are called 'respondents.'



## Key findings of the second COVID-19 Disability Survey:

### Mental health and social isolation

Most respondents (78%) said the pandemic has hurt their mental health. In the adult respondents, 90% had a worse mental health score than the average population. Most adults (82%) were also more isolated and lonelier than average. Almost all children with disabilities (98%) have worse relationships with their peers than average.

#### Unmet needs

More than half of the respondents said they have unmet needs. Unmet needs are mostly about the lack of services. This includes supports like mental health services. It also includes services to make sure people are not isolated and alone.

Many (over 60%) said these four important needs are unmet.

- Emotional counseling
- Peer support
- Access to recreation and leisure programs
- Attendant care services

### Worries and stressors

Respondents said that they worry a lot. Half of the respondents worry often about the following issues.

- Finances
- Future plans
- Friends and family

They also worry about the following things:

- Access to vaccines
- Catching COVID-19
- Becoming very sick
- Transportation safety and cleanliness
- World problems

### Loss of employment

The COVID-19 pandemic affected peoples' jobs. This has affected people with disabilities. They are at a higher risk of unemployment than the general population. Most people with disabilities (68%) said the pandemic affected their jobs. People said their hours were cut. Some people were laid off or put on leave without pay. This is twice as many as in the first survey (34%). Reduced work for Canadians with disabilities is of great concern.

### Health habits

The COVID-19 crisis made people with disabilities less healthy. Almost 60% said they are doing less physical activity. Almost 60% also said they have worse eating habits. Those who smoke, use cannabis or drink alcohol reported they used more since the pandemic started. Between 43% and 51% said they increased their use.

There is some good news. Only 19% said they met the World Health Organization's (WHO) adult exercise guidelines in the first survey. In the second survey that number was up to 32%.

### Children with disabilities

Among children with disabilities, 63% are less active than before the pandemic. Almost half (47%) have worse eating habits. More than half (56%) of children do not do 60 minutes of moderate to hard activity on any day of the week.

More information about the survey can be found at this website:

<https://osf.io/z4gr2/>



## Key Messages

- This report shows a view of how the pandemic is affecting Canadians with disabilities. It shows the affect of COVID-19 on their well being.
- The report shows that people are very concerned about the following issues.
  - Mental health
  - Social isolation
  - Jobs and work
- People with disabilities have unmet needs since the start of the pandemic. They need services to support their mental health. They also need services to prevent social isolation. People said they need more of the following services.
  - Counselling
  - Peer support
  - Recreation and leisure programs
  - Attendant care
- Adults with disabilities are working less during the pandemic. More than half reported less work hours since the start of COVID-19.
- The pandemic changed people's health. Canadians with disabilities report changes in their lifestyles. They are less healthy than before the pandemic.





## Introduction to this report

The purpose of the COVID-19 survey is to get information. The needs and concerns of people with disabilities are important in this information. It will help with supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. It will help with the response to COVID-19. It will help in meeting the needs of people of all abilities.

Adults who identify as a person with a disability can take the survey. Parents and caregivers of children with a disability can also take the survey. The survey includes questions about people's needs and fears. It also asks about their lifestyle and well-being.

Respondents will take the survey more than once. This will show any changes in their situation over time. This report shows the results of the second time the survey was done. The results are for 708 people who took this survey. They did it between December 19, 2020 and September 8, 2021.

The survey is available in English, French, and Plain Language. It is available in American Sign Language on this website: [www.disabilitysurvey.ca/](http://www.disabilitysurvey.ca/). More information about the survey can be found here <https://osf.io/z4gr2/>. The records that support this report are also on this website. This report is divided into three parts.

Part 1 looks at the information from the following survey respondents.

- Adults living with a disability
- Family members of people with disabilities
- Roommates of people with disabilities

Part 2 looks at the information about children with disabilities.

Part 3 shows information from the first and second round of the survey. It shows information that is the same or different between the two surveys.



## PART 1: Information about who took the survey

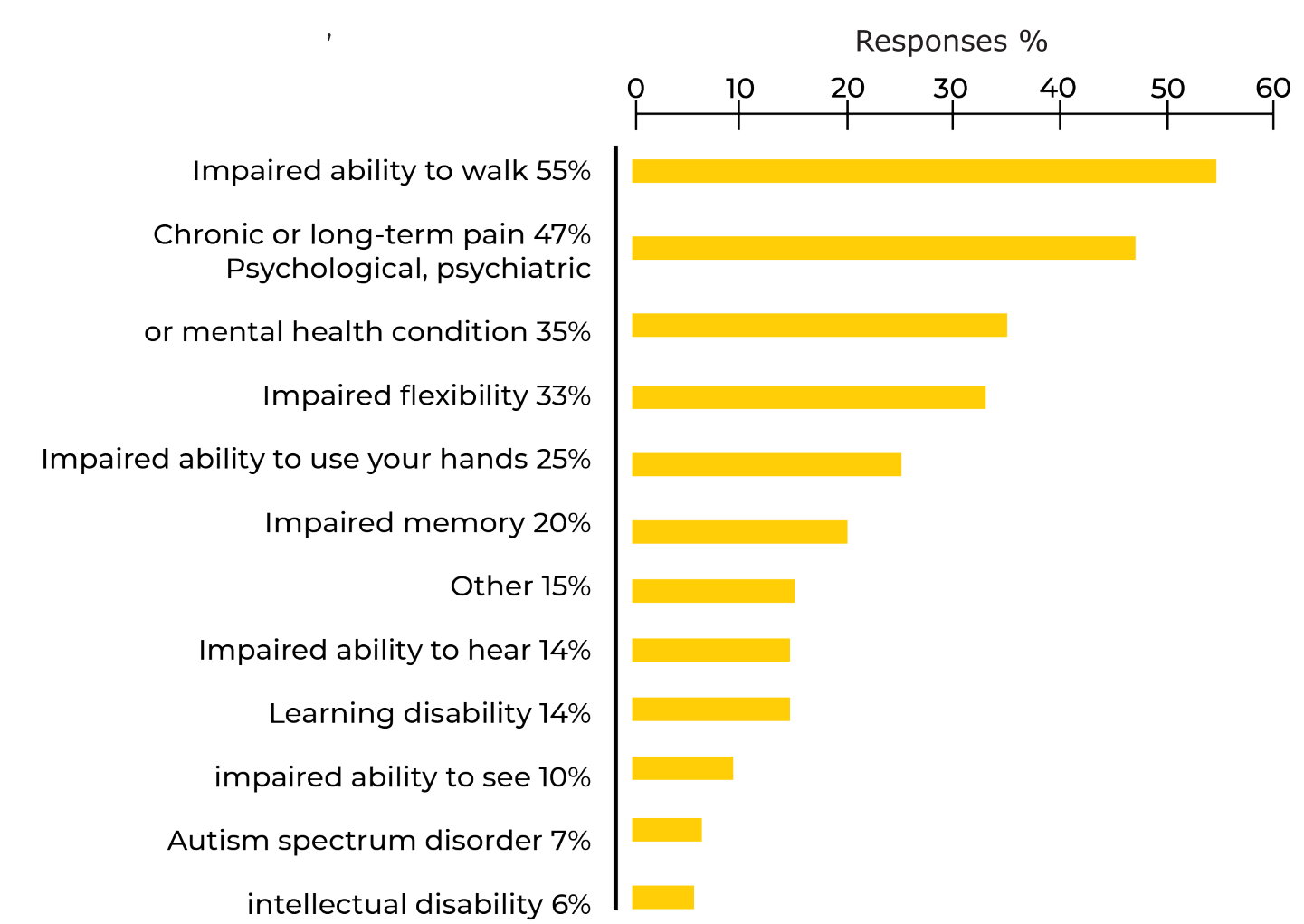
### Who took the survey?

This part gives information about the people who took the survey. This includes things like who they are and where they are from.

A total of 708 people filled out the survey.

- 74% said they were a person with a disability.
- 26% said they were a parent or caregiver of a child with a disability.
- 23% said they have a family member or roommate with a disability.
- 65% said they were women.
- 30% said they were men.
- 5% did not say their gender. They may have also said another gender identity.
- Their ages range from 19 to 95 years old.
- Their average age was 48 years old.

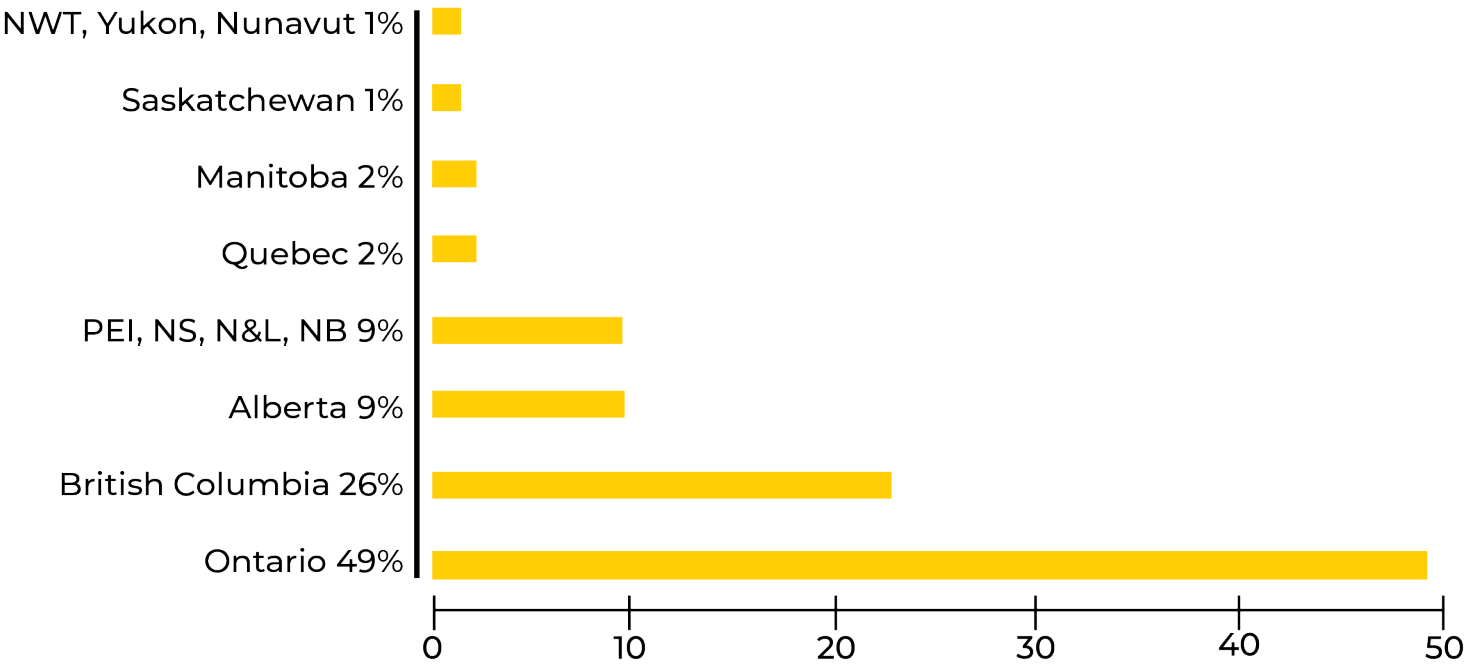
### Types of disabilities reported by respondents



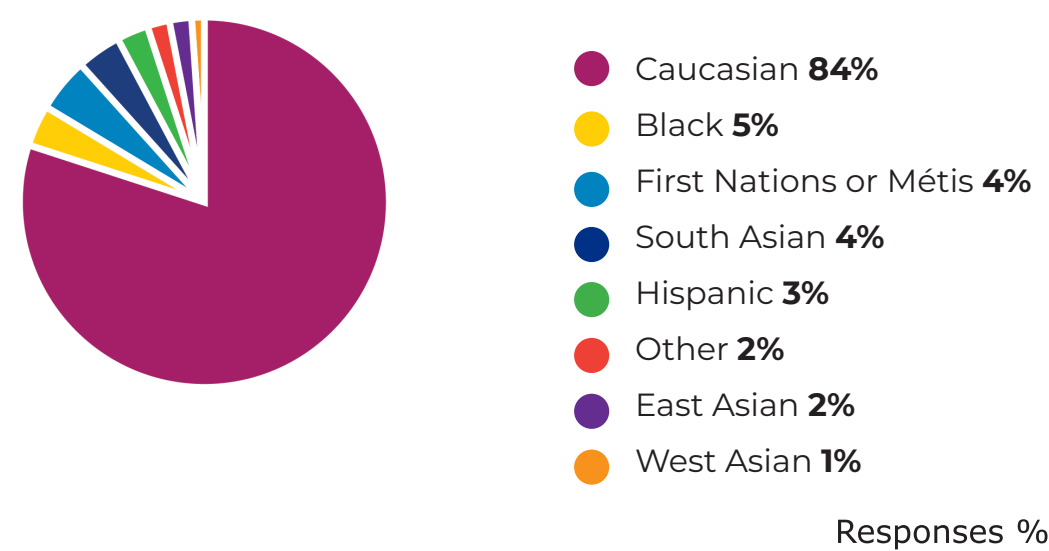
Examples of other impairments/conditions/disabilities reported:

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

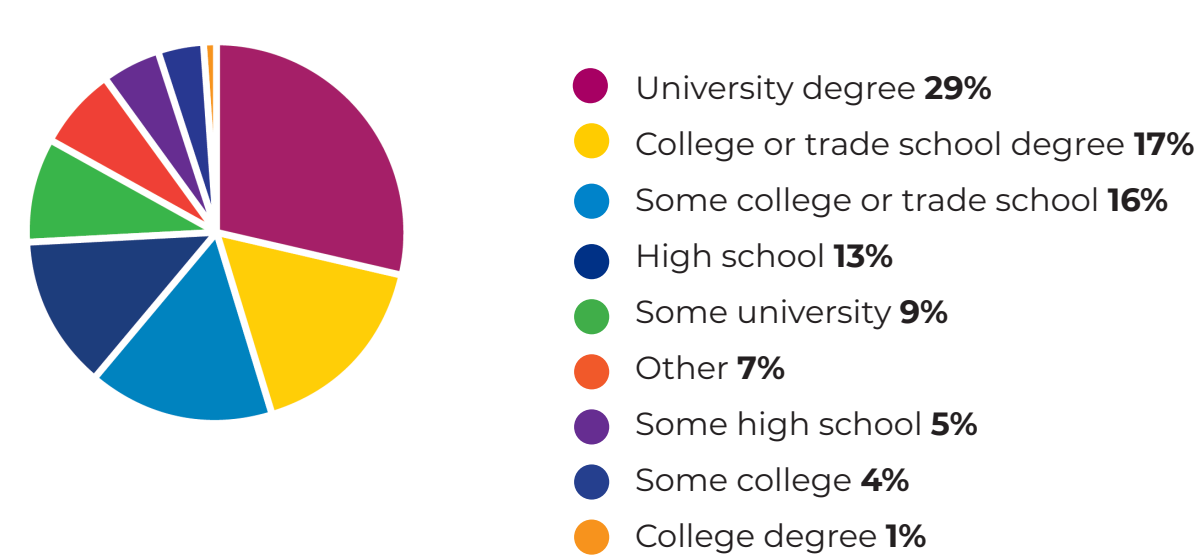
Province or territory of residence



Ethnicity

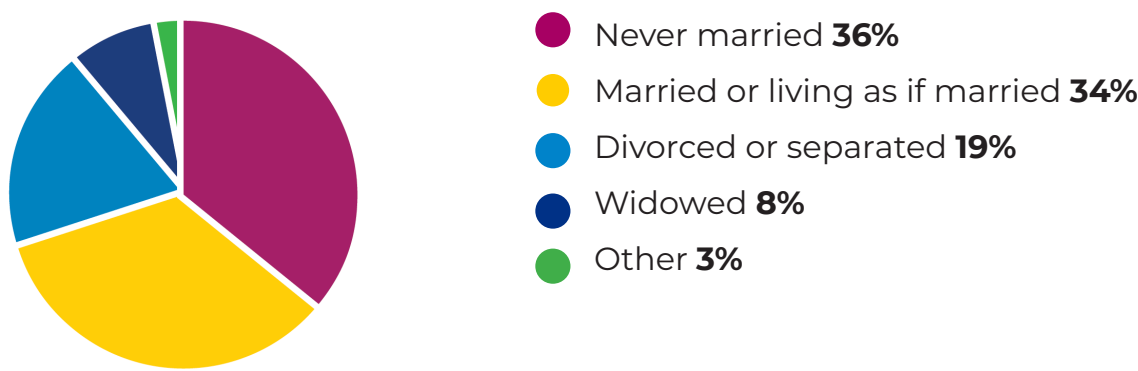


Highest level of education received

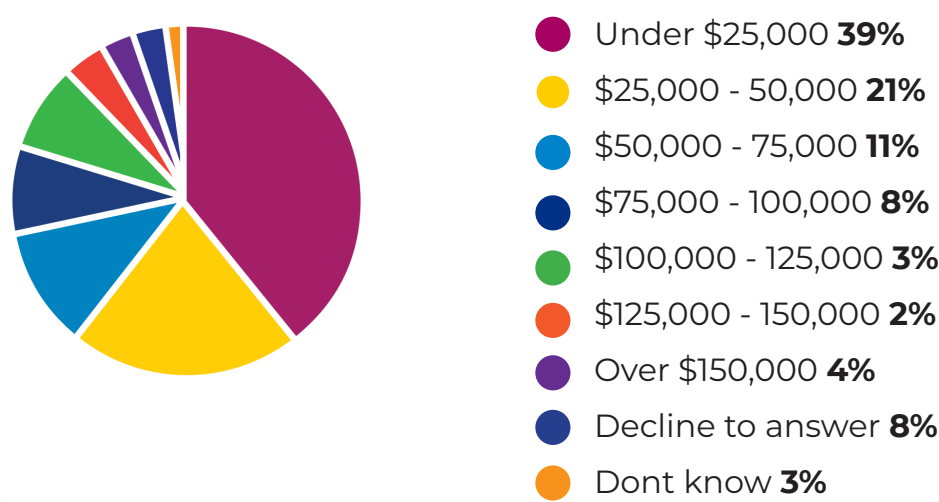




Marital status



Total household income after taxes in last 12 months







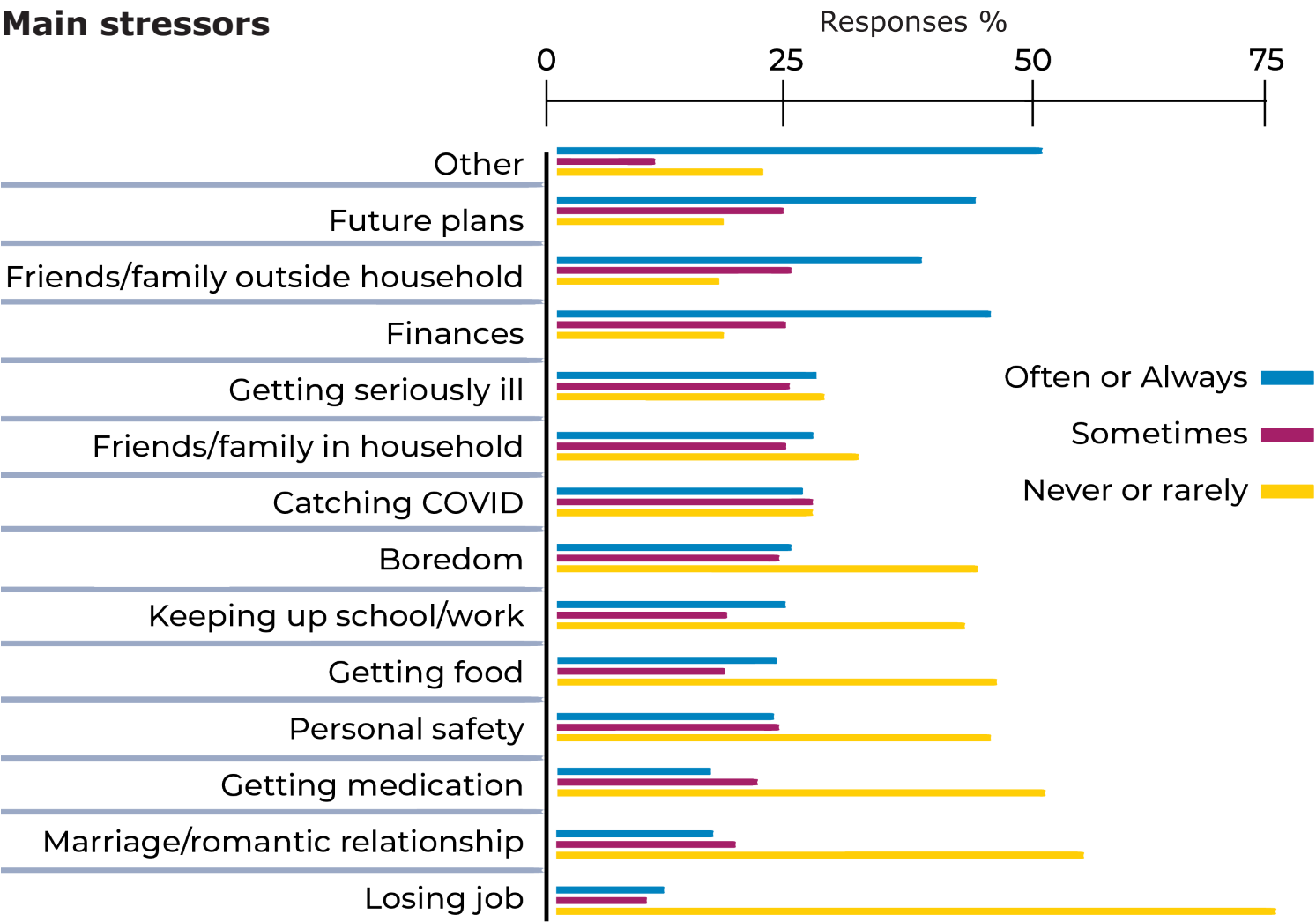
Impact of COVID-19 on employment



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

65% of respondents reported a change in their job status since the start of the pandemic. Some people said that their hours had been reduced. Some said that they had been laid off. Some said they were on leave with no pay.

Main stressors



Respondents talked about the things they worry about. The things they worried about the most were their future and their friends and family. Sometimes, they are also worried about their money or finances. They are afraid of getting seriously ill as well.

Respondents also reported other fears and worries in the following areas:

- Getting services
- Getting medical care
- Housing and being homeless
- Feeling lonely and abandoned
- Not getting to socialize
- Not getting government support
- Having a loved one die
- Being anxious and afraid for the world
- Accessing (safe) transportation





**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%	-	-

What information does the table above show?

This table looks at people’s needs. The first column shows the types of needs people have. The second column of Table 1 shows that respondent’s needs were not met during the pandemic. Over half said that 6 different types of needs were not met. Here is a list of the areas of needs that were not met.

- Attendant care
- Income support
- Emotional counselling
- Peer support
- Recreation and Leisure programs
- Access to food/shops/groceries

The third column shows the number of respondents who have received support for each need. Most respondents got support for their need of income support (40%). This was mainly support from the government.

People with disabilities need support during the pandemic. Many respondents (60%) said these three important needs are not being met.

- Recreation and leisure programs
- Emotional counselling
- Peer support

Less than one quarter (from 14% to 22%) of respondents got assistance for these three needs. Government has not done enough to support them in these areas. Any support they got came from community groups, friends, or neighbors.

Half (from 42% to 60%) said that other needs were also not being met. These needs are in the following areas:

- Attendant care
- Accessible housing
- Medical supplies

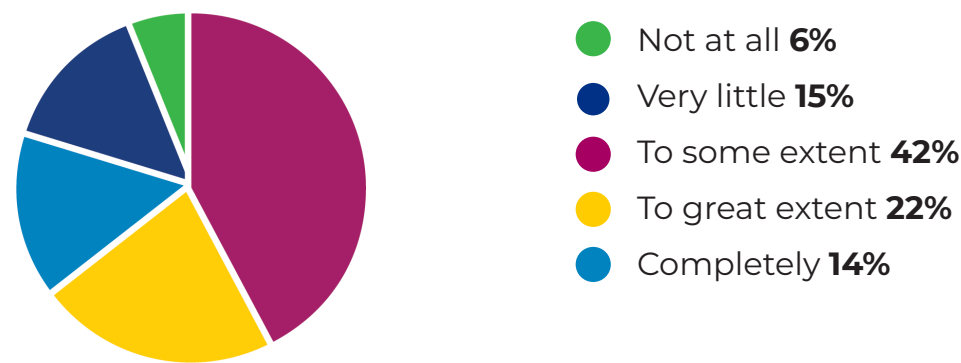
Less than one quarter (from 11% to 12%) of respondents said they received support for these needs. The support they did get came mostly from government.

More than half of respondents said they did get support for the following needs.

- Drugs and medicine
- Financial planning
- Delivery of food / grocery / medicine
- Clothing, cleaning supplies, face masks and other COVID-19 related items
- Household chores and personal care support
- Support for children’s needs

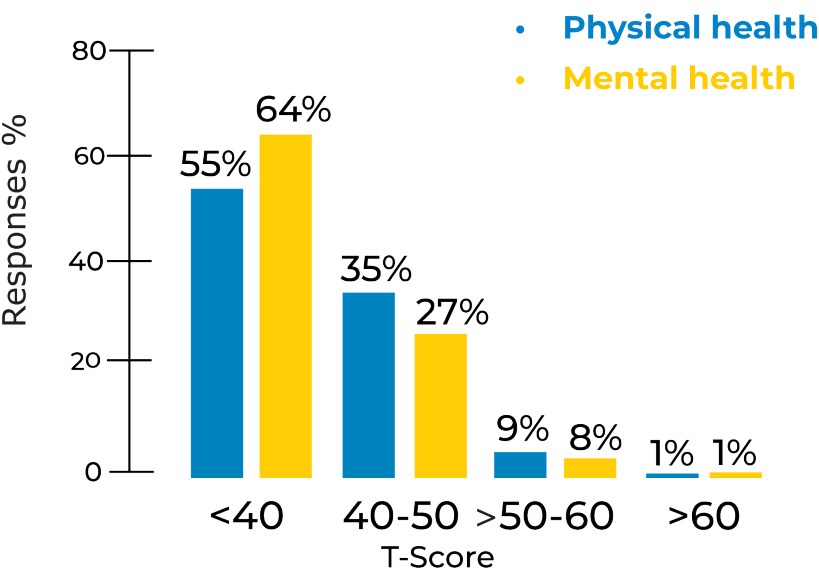
**COVID Impact on mental health**

These results are from adults who identified as a person with a disability.

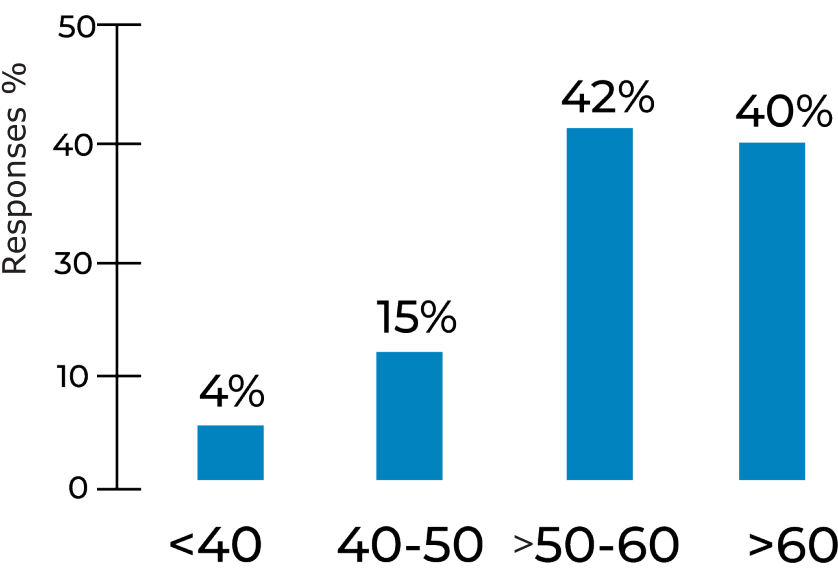


Most respondents (78%) said that the COVID-19 pandemic has made their mental health worse.

Physical and mental health



Social isolation



A regular questionnaire method was used for the survey. People were asked about the following areas.

- Their physical health
- Their mental health
- Their feelings of social isolation or loneliness

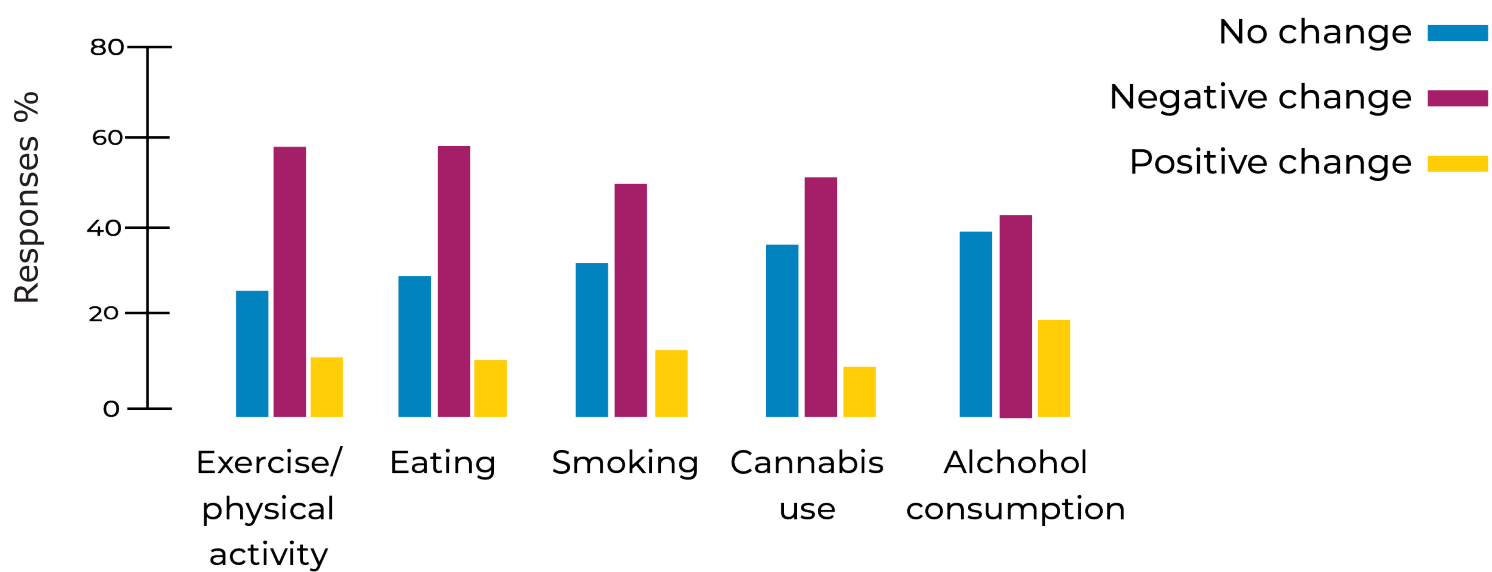
The survey found that people with disabilities did worse in these areas than the average person.

- Almost all, 90%, said their physical health is worse than the average person.
- About 82% said they are lonelier and more isolated than the average person.
- About 9% said their mental health is better than the average person.
- About 91% said their mental health is worse than the average person.



Lifestyle

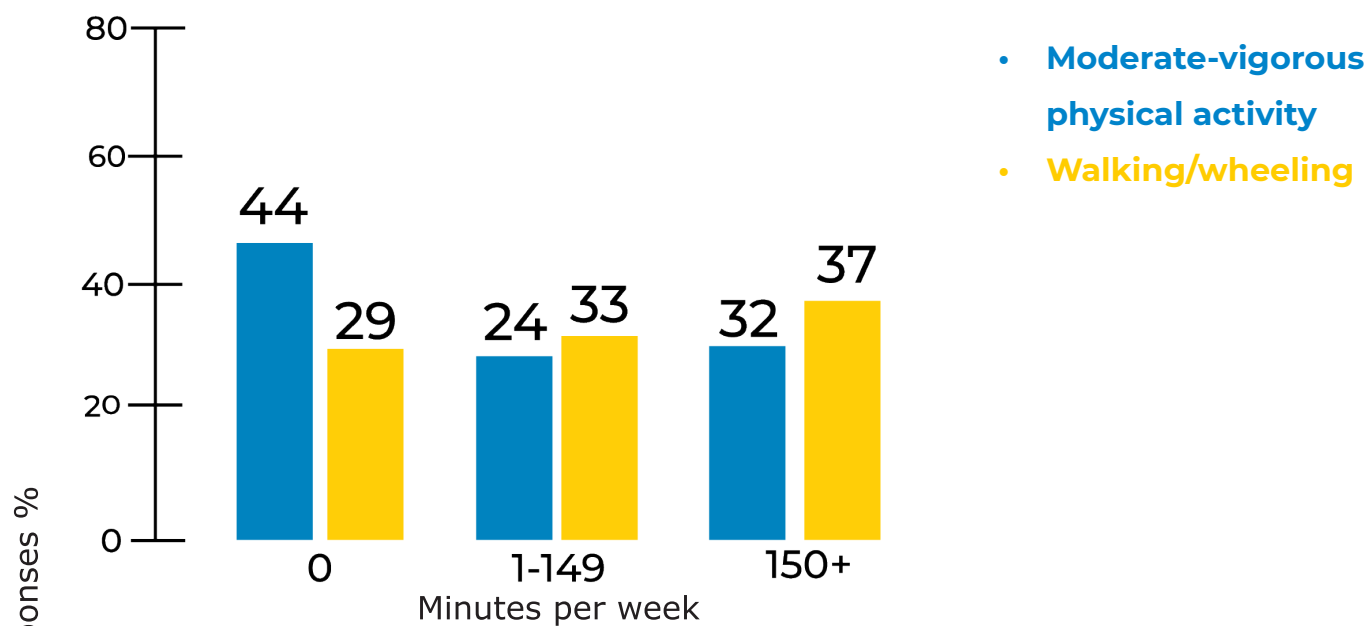
How have your health habits changed since the start of the pandemic?



The COVID-19 crisis has made people with disabilities less healthy.

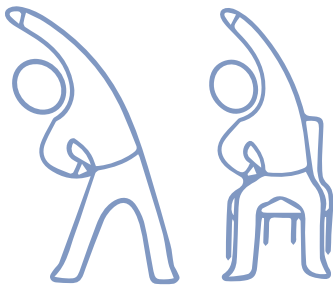
- Over half (60%) of respondents said they were less active.
- Over half of respondents said they had worse eating habits.
- Half of respondents who smoke tobacco smoked more during the pandemic.
- Over half of respondents who smoke cannabis smoked more during the pandemic.
- Almost half (43%) of respondents who drink alcohol drank more during the pandemic.

Physical activity levels



Respondents say they have been less physically active because of the pandemic.

- Almost half (44%) say they did not do any moderate or hard exercise
- The WHO says adults need 150 minutes of moderate exercise every week. Only 32% of respondents get this amount.
- Most said they did some walking or wheeling in the last week.
- About one-third (29%) said they did no walking or wheeling at all.



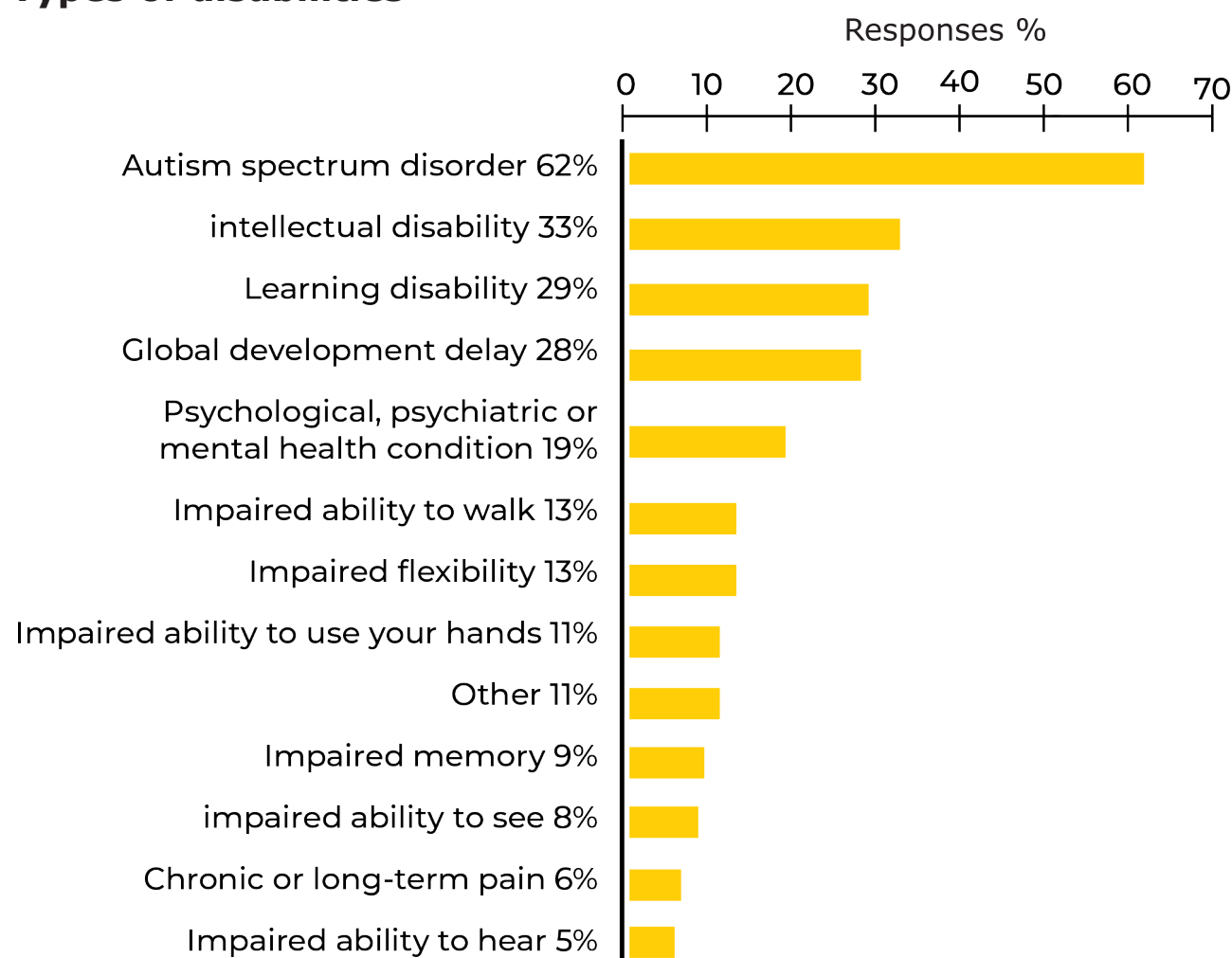
## PART 2: Information about children with disabilities

### Demographics of children with disabilities

This section has information about children with disabilities.

- 183 respondents said they are a parent or caregiver to a child with a disability.
- 61% of the children are boys.
- 39% of the children are girls.
- The children range in age from 3 to 48 years old.
- The average age of the children is 16 years old.

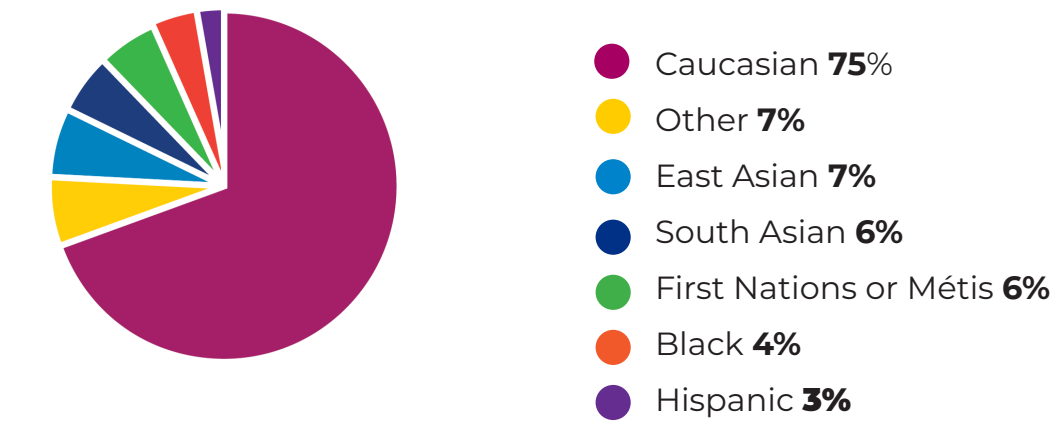
### Types of disabilities



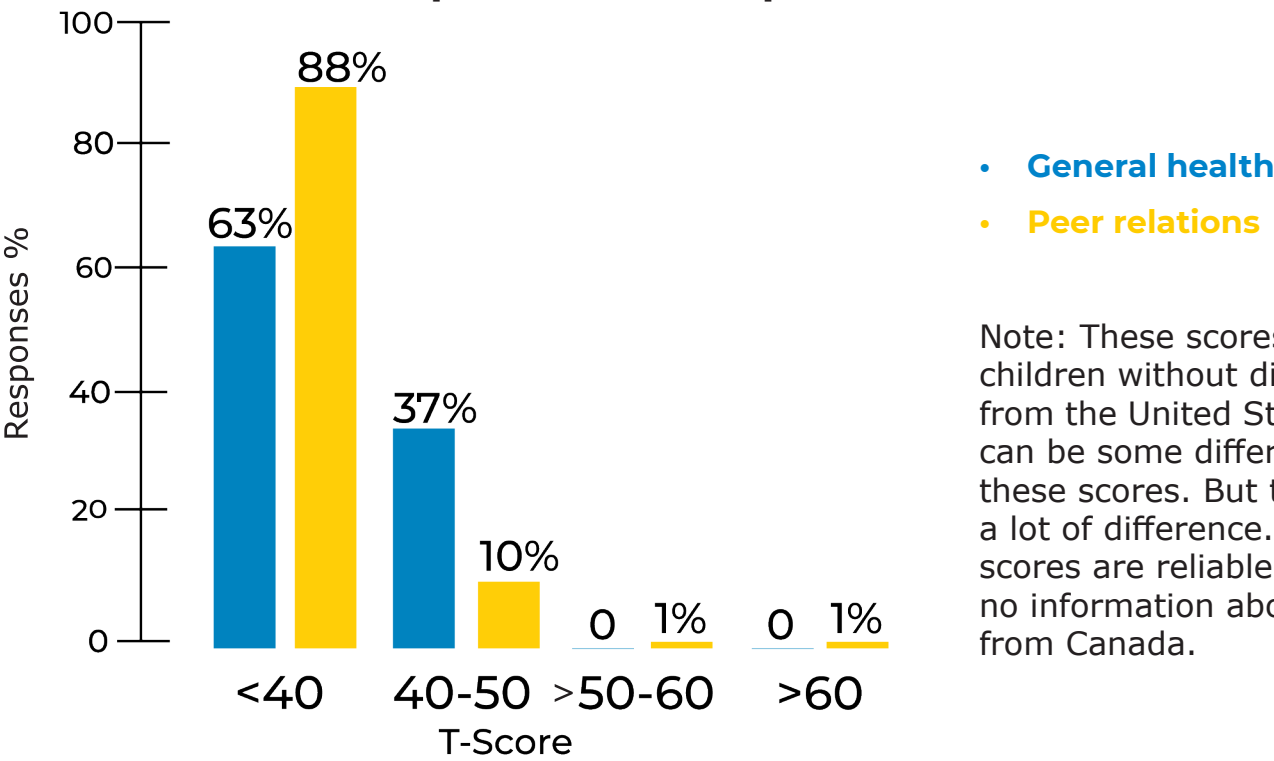
### These are examples of other disabilities reported:

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Neurological disorders
- Dwarfism
- More than one condition
- Seizures

Ethnicity

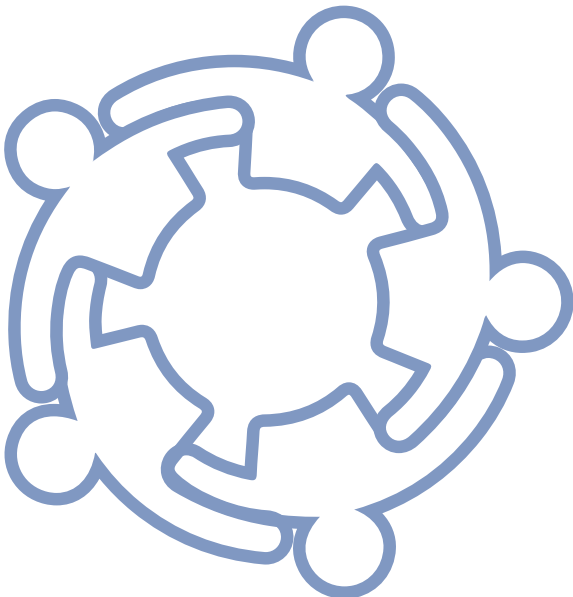


General health and peer relationships



Respondents gave information about their child’s health.

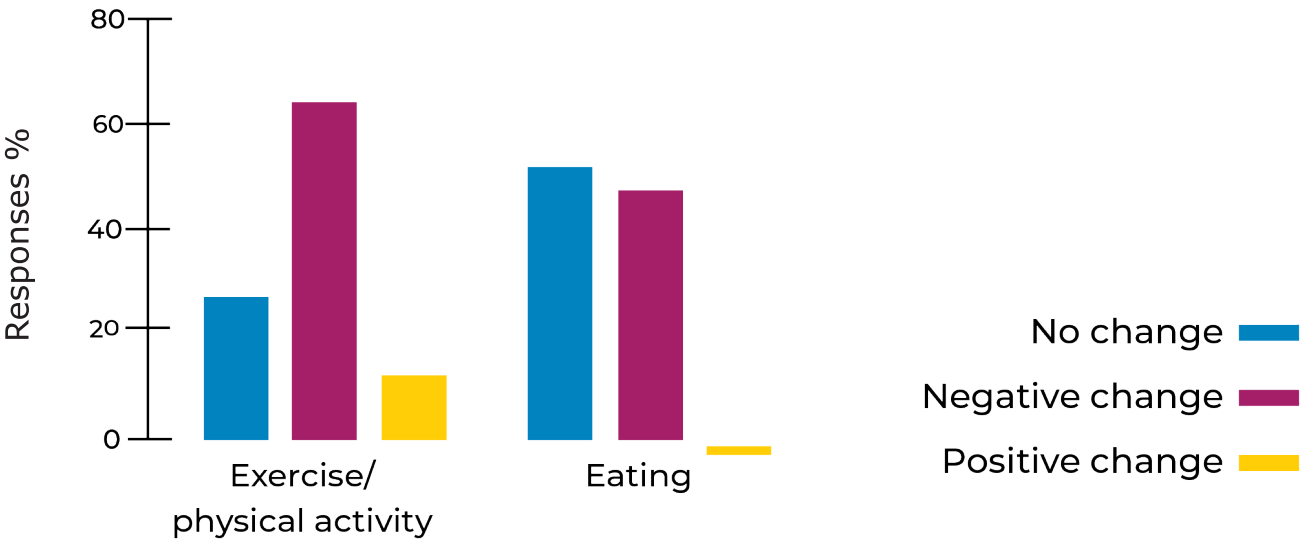
- All said their child’s health seems to be less than the general population.
- Almost all (98%) said their child’s relationships with their friends seem to be worse than the general population.





Lifestyle

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

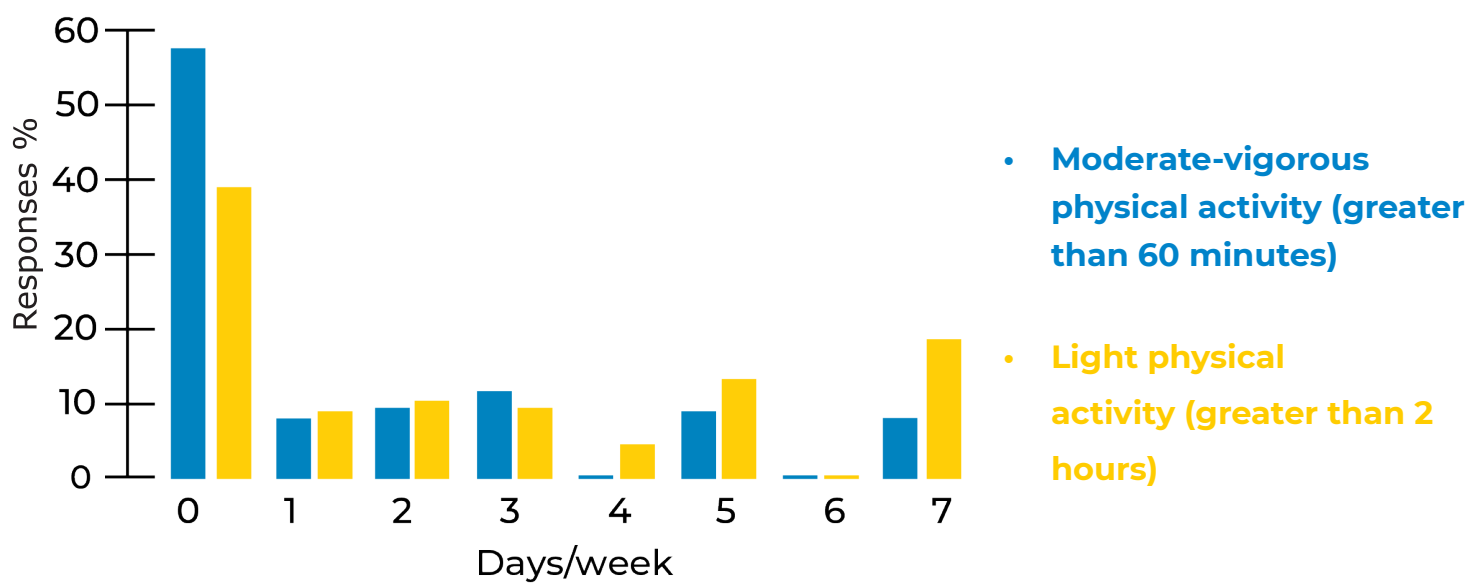


The results for children are like the results for adults.

- Some people have active children. They said that their children are less active because of the pandemic.
- The pandemic did not affect the diet of most children.
- A few children did have their diet affected by the pandemic. It has gotten much worse.

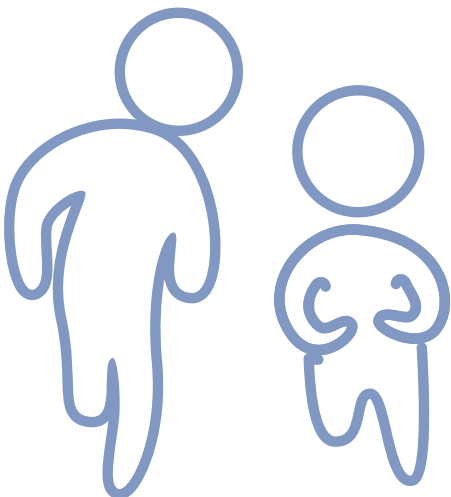


On how many days each week did your child engage in moderate-vigorous physical activity for more than 60 minutes or light physical activity for 2 or more hours?



There are World Health Recommendations for exercise. For children, it is 60 minutes of moderate to hard exercise every day. More than 50% of children with disabilities do not do this. Most (83%) do not do light exercise for more than two hours each day. Light physical activity means things like walking or wheeling. Only 7% of children with disabilities meet these daily recommendations.

About 60% of children have had less exercise and played less sports since COVID-19 began. This is similar to what adults with disabilities said. Eating habits were also affected by pandemic. Eating habits got worse for about half of the children. The other half was not affected.



## PART 3: How does this report compare to the previous report?

- The first report shows responses over the first six months of the survey. This was from June to December 2020.
- This report shows survey responses over the next nine months. This was from December 2020 to September 2021.

### Section 1A: Demographics

- The number of people who took each survey was similar. There were 708 people who did the second survey. There were 713 who did the first survey.
- The number that identified as a man, woman, or preferred not to answer was similar in each.
- The average age was similar. It was 49 years old in the first report. It is 48 years old in this second report. The age range was also similar.
- The ethnic diversity of the respondents was similar.
- The most common reported disabilities were the same for both surveys.
- Limits in the ability to walk
- Chronic pain
- Psychological, psychiatric, or mental health condition
- There were about 40% of respondents who reported a similar income to the first survey. This was a total household income of under \$25,000 in the past 12 months.

### Section 1B: COVID-19 stresses and needs

- Jobs and work were more affected in the second survey. Around 16% of respondents in the first survey said they worked less hours. But 35% reported less hours in the second survey. Around 12% said they were laid off in the first survey. But 18% reported being laid off in the second survey. There were 6% who were on leave without pay in the first survey. But there were 15% who reported this in the second survey.
- The greatest unmet need in both surveys was access to leisure and recreation programs. Most respondents in the first survey (76%) and second survey (69%) said this need was unmet.
- Less people had unmet needs for access to medical supplies in the second survey. Around 58% had unmet needs in the first survey. About 42% had unmet needs in the second survey.
- Less people had unmet needs for transportation in the second survey. Around 61% had unmet needs in the first survey. About 48% had unmet needs in the second survey.

### Section 1C: General health and social isolation

- The pandemic had a negative effect on the mental health of about 80% of respondents. This was similar in both surveys.
- People in both surveys said they had worse physical health than average.
- More people in the second survey had a physical health score of less than 40. There were 50% reporting this in the first survey. But there were 64% reporting it in the second survey.

### Section 1D: Lifestyle

- The pandemic made some people's smoking habit worse. This went up from the first survey (28%) to the second survey (50%).
- More people in this second survey met the WHO's weekly exercise guidelines. This went up from 19% in the first survey to 32% in this second one. People reporting no exercise in the previous week went down from 59% to 44%.

### Section 2A: Demographics of children with disabilities

More parents or caregivers took part in the second survey. There were 183 in the second survey. There were 150 in the first survey.

Around 60% of children were boys. Around 40% were girls.

- The average child's age was similar in both surveys. It was 16 years old in the second survey. It was 15 years old in the first survey.
- The ethnic diversity of those who filled out the surveys was similar for both.
- This second survey has a larger percentage of children with autism spectrum disorder. It is 62% in the second survey. It was 45% in the first survey.
- This second survey has a smaller percentage of children with a learning disability. It is 29% in the second survey. It was 41% in the first survey.

### Section 2B: General health and social isolation

- There were a greater number of parents and caregivers who reported low peer relations scores. A score of 50 out of 100 is average for the general population. The second survey shows 88% of scores less than 40. It was 76% in the first survey.

### Sections 2C: Lifestyle

- Both surveys report that children exercise less since the pandemic began. It was 66% in the second survey. It was 63% in the first survey. More than half of children still do not get 60 minutes of exercise every day.
- The first survey found that some children's (13%) diets improved since the start of the pandemic. None of the people in the second survey reported improved diets.



**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