

Overlapping Constituencies:  
A Survey of Disability and the  
Representative Members of the  
Congressional Tri-Caucus

July 2003

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# Overlapping Constituencies: A Survey of Disability and the Representative Members of the Congressional Tri-Caucus

When we talk about disability, we are talking about the social reaction to an impairment or physical fact. The label of disability can be said to be a social, political, and disproportional economic construction that is based on a societal interpretation of impairment.

## Disability Overview

Data collected from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) as reported in a 1997 Census Bureau Population Report (*issued February 2001*)<sup>1</sup> has revealed that 19.7% of the US population, nearly 52.6 million people have a limitation in a functional activity or social role. Of this population, slightly more than 33 million people are classified as having a severe disability. SIPP defines a person as having a severe disability when one or more of the following conditions are met.

- The person is unable to perform one or more functional activities;
- The person needs personal assistance with an activity of daily living;
- The person uses a wheelchair or is a long-term user of a cane, crutches, or a walker;
- The person has a developmental disability or Alzheimer's disease;
- The person is unable to do housework;
- The person is receiving federal disability benefits; or

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Data Current Population Report, Series P70-73.

- The person is 16 to 67 years old and is unable to work at a job or business.

## Disability and Poverty

SIPP data also reveals that the poverty rate for the population with disabilities ages 25-64 is 27.9% compared to the rate of 8.3% for the same age population without a disability.

## Disability and Age

The data also shows that disability and severe disability rates increase with age as noted below.

Age Group (for entire population)	Percentage with a disability (all severities)
Less than 15 years	7.8%
15-24 years	10.7%
25-44 years	13.4%
45-54 years	22.6%
55-64 years	35.7%
65-69 years	44.9%
80+ years	73.6%

Comparing these age group disability rates against current (2000) Census Bureau United State Demographic Characteristics suggests, that the proportion of the US populations classified as having a disability will continue to increase as more of people move into higher age brackets.

In fact, a review of 1991-1992 disability data generated from a SIPP report when compared to the 1997 data (used for this summary) reveals that the overall disability rate for the US population has increased to 19.7% from 19.4%. This percentage increase equates to nearly 3.7 million more people with disabilities.

## Disability and Race

The data indicates that disability reaches across racial lines. The prevalence of disability by race is nationally reported as follows:

Characteristics	Total Population	Percentage with a disability (all severities)	Percentage with a severe disability
White (non-Hispanic) – all ages	193,234,000	20.7%	13.3%
Black – all ages	34,369,000	21.3%	15.7%
Asian or Pacific Islander – all ages	4,445,000	13.0%	8.5%
Hispanic – all ages	30,086,000	13.8%	9.7%

Accordingly, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC), and the Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) represent, as part of their constituencies, over 12 million people with disabilities.

## Summary

Demographic shifts based on the aging population and race distribution continue to expand the opportunities to include the consideration of issues relating to disability, accessibility, and economic development into all facets of our public policy and public initiatives. The concept of competitive employment is inextricably linked to the reality of competitive skills. The costs associated with the acquisition of these skills can be viewed as an investment in that person’s successful vocational outcome and ultimate societal contribution.



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