



CommunicationFIRST

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AAC Counts: Prevalence Data Highlights from Previous Surveys

The AAC Counts Project is a joint initiative of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) and CommunicationFIRST, being undertaken in 2022 with a generous grant from Ability Central. The goal of the project is to lay the groundwork to begin to remedy the nearly complete absence of robust prevalence, demographic, and characteristic data about people in the United States who cannot rely on speech alone to be heard and understood. As we conduct a comprehensive literature review on this topic, we have compiled these key statistics thus far that *do* exist to estimate prevalence. More information about the AAC Counts Project can be found here: <https://communicationfirst.org/aac-counts/>

Children

- **2.17% of US children aged 2-4 and 1.23% of US children aged 5-17** had a lot of difficulty being understood or could not be understood by people outside the household; **0.67% of children aged 5-17** had a lot of difficulty being understood inside the household (2020 CDC National Center for Health Statistics National Health Interview Survey: representative sample of civilian noninstitutionalized US population)
- **5% of US children aged 3-17 had “speech problems” and 3.3% had “language problems”** during the past 12 months (2012 CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics National Health Interview Survey)
 - Speech problem: “... problem speaking, such as making speech sounds correctly or stuttering, that lasted for a week or longer?”
 - Language problem: “... problem learning, using, or understanding words or sentences that lasted for a week or longer?”
- **2.5% of US children aged 3-17** were rated by their parents as having a “moderate/severe” “current speech or other language disorder” (2019-2020 HRSA National Survey of Children’s Health (representative sample of noninstitutionalized US children aged 0-17))
- **735,000 US children aged 6-14 had difficulty having speech understood** (145,000 “severe”) (2010 US Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP))

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pre-2014 Adult and the Child Functional Limitations modules (non-institutionalized US population)

- **1.12% of all New Mexico K-12 students have “highly unintelligible speech”** (Binger et al. (2021) survey of public school SLPs)
- **1.53% of all North Dakota children aged 5-21 “speak less than 15 recognizable words”** (Burd et al. (1988) headcount survey of all schools and state agencies)
- **0.3% to 0.6% of all Washington school-age children did not use speech as a primary mode of communication** (Matas et al. (1985) survey of special ed teachers)
- **1.3% of children aged 2-4 and 0.8% of children aged 5-17 in 70 low and middle income countries had a lot of difficulty being understood or could not be understood** (UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS): 2021 survey of primary caregivers in 70 low and middle income countries)

Adults

- **2% of US adults (4.7 million) reported “speech problems”; 1.2% (2.8 million) reported “language problems”** (2012 CDC’s National Center for Health Statistics National Health Interview Survey)
 - Speech problem: “... problem speaking, such as making speech sounds correctly or stuttering, that lasted for a week or longer?”
 - Language problem: “... problem learning, using, or understanding words or sentences that lasted for a week or longer?”
- **1.2% of US adults aged 15+ (2.8 million) reported having “difficulty having speech understood”; of that amount, 523,000 reported having “severe difficulty”** (2010 US Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) pre-2014 Adult and the Child Functional Limitations modules (non-institutionalized US adult population))
- **1.5% of US adults had a speech disability; most not “severe”** (2014 Social Security Administration Supplement)
- **843,000 US adults aged 65+ reported “difficulty,” and 158,000 US adults aged 65+ reported “severe difficulty”** (2010 US Census Bureau Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) pre-2014 Adult and the Child Functional Limitations modules (non-institutionalized US adult population))



- **4.55% of US adults reported “at least some difficulty” with communication, including hearing (2020 CDC’s NHIS)**
- **2.4% (median; range 0.7%-7.9%) reported “at least some difficulty” with communication (Washington Group Survey question) (World Health Organization (2022) (2021 national and subnational survey in 35 countries of 330,000 people using the “rapid Assistive Technology Assessment (rATA) questionnaire”))**
 - 0.12% need “communication boards/pictures/cards”; access to same reported at 1.75%

Intellectual or Developmental Disability (I/DD) Program Recipients

- **24% of participants in I/DD Home and Community Based Services in 30+ states communicate "nonverbally" (National Core Indicators, 2014)**
 - **22% “did not use speech as a preferred means of communication” (National Core Indicators, 2016-18)**
- **52% of people with I/DD in public residential settings “could not express their needs verbally” (2016 UMN Residential Information Systems Project (RISP) longitudinal study)**
- **14% of people aged 3+ with DD served by California’s Regional Centers “do not communicate with words” (June 2021 California Client Development Evaluation Report) (about 43,900 people, which is about 0.1% of California’s population of 39.5 million)**

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