

Office of Disability Employment Policy

Defining Disability



You likely interact with people with disabilities every day. People with disabilities are your friends, family members, and neighbors. Perhaps you have a disability, too. About 22 million (11%) working-age people (ages 18 to 64) in the United States have a disability (2022 American Community Survey). It is important to know that *disability* has a specific definition in the context of policy and employment. (See “How is disability defined?” below.)

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▼ How does disability inclusion benefit my workplace?

Hiring and employing disabled workers demonstrates an employer’s commitment to inclusion and promotes a high-performing workforce. Disability inclusion benefits all companies—including those in the construction, manufacturing, and clean energy industries—by providing new and diverse ways of thinking, a talented pool of workers, and better performance. [According to a recent research report](#) [PDF], disability-inclusive companies earn 1.6 times more revenue, 2.6 times more net income, and have twice the economic profit compared to non-disability-inclusive companies. (Learn more about the [business benefits of employing people with disabilities](#) [PDF].)

▼ How is disability defined?

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a person with a disability is someone with a condition that substantially limits one or more of their “major life activities.”

Disability includes, but is not limited to:

- Physical and mobility disabilities (e.g., spinal cord injuries)
- Hearing disabilities, such as being D/deaf or hard of hearing
- Vision disabilities, including being blind or low vision
- Mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression, or PTSD)
- Neurodivergence (e.g., autism, ADHD, or learning disabilities such as dyslexia)
- Intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (e.g., Down syndrome)
- “Nonapparent” disabilities (e.g., health conditions such as heart disease, lupus, cancer, substance use disorders, or Long COVID)

No matter their disability, whether apparent or nonapparent, people with disabilities offer talent and a variety of skills and abilities. This historically untapped talent pool of millions of people can and should be part of the solution to filling the more than nine million job openings in the United States.

▼ Who are workers with disabilities?

Disabled workers come from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They work in all industries, many in skilled trade professions: across the country, 25.1% of disabled workers are employed in skilled trade jobs (i.e., in agriculture and natural resources; construction; maintenance and installation; production and manufacturing; and transportation).

Data and statistics can help employers understand how disability intersects with the workers they seek to hire and help determine their own metrics for building an inclusive workforce. You can use the resources below to glean more data about disabled workers, including statistics about disabled workers from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, working women with disabilities, and what the disability workforce looks like in your local community:

- A [breakdown of disability prevalence](#) by gender, race, and ethnicity from the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN).
- Data and statistics on workers with and without disabilities from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) and [DOL’s Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#).
- A series of [blog posts](#) from ODEP that offer specific information about workers with disabilities, including those with disabilities from specific backgrounds and across industries.

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Employment Policy**

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