## **2023 CHES Mental Health Report - Inequities in Mental Health** People with Disabilities

**Communities Experiencing Inequities in Poor Mental Health**

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) envisions an equitable public health system that supports optimal well-being for all people in Massachusetts. This includes equitable opportunities for all to achieve mental health and emotional well-being. As summarized in the previous section, the overall burden of poor mental health in Massachusetts is high. However, this burden is not equal across all communities. Poor mental health outcomes are disproportionately concentrated within certain populations due to systems of oppression and other root causes of health inequities.

This section will further explore the mental health findings to highlight inequities in poor mental health experienced within certain communities of focus. The 2023 CHES provides important insights into mental health inequities within Massachusetts by allowing for disaggregation by populations that are often underrepresented or made invisible in other datasets. The following sections highlight several communities of focus that reported the highest burden of poor mental outcomes. Importantly, these are not the only communities that experience inequities in mental health. Future population spotlights will dive deeper into the needs, assets, and inequities experienced within each of our communities of focus.

***People with Disabilities***

People with disabilities are a diverse group of individuals with a wide range of identities, abilities, and experiences. Disabilities are defined as conditions interacting with environmental and social barriers that make it more difficult for people to do certain activities and interact with the world around them[[1]](#endnote-2). Ableism is a system of oppression that discriminates against and creates disadvantages for people with disabilities. Ableism leads to structural, environmental, and social barriers that make it more difficult for people with disabilities to fully engage and interact with the world around them[[2]](#endnote-3). People with disabilities often experience more mental distress than people without disabilities. In the US, an estimated 17.4 million adults with disabilities experience frequent mental distress, which is 4.6 times as often as adults without disabilities[[3]](#endnote-4). Consistent with national data, the 2023 CHES show that people with disabilities are more likely to experience poor mental health outcomes.

Figure 7. 2023 CHES – Adult Psychological Distress by Disability Status

Overall, people with disabilities had significantly worse mental health outcomes compared to people without disabilities.

* Approximately 1 in 2 adults aged 18 and older with disabilities and 3 in 4 youth aged 14 to 17 with disabilities reported high/very high psychological distress.
* Approximately 15% of adults with a disability and 35% of youth with a disability reported suicidal ideation.
* Adults with a disability were over 3 times as likely to report social isolation compared to those without a disability.

The 2023 CHES intentionally sampled from individuals living with different types of disabilities, allowing for further disaggregation within the disability community. Unsurprisingly, mental health status was not uniform across disability type, highlighting the importance of data disaggregation within this community. As seen in Table 4, people with cognitive, learning/intellectual, and self-care/independent living disabilities reported particularly high rates of poor mental outcomes among all disability types.

*Table 4. 2023 CHES Mental Health by Disability Type*

|  | Psychological Distress –  High or Very High | | Suicidal Ideation | | Social Isolation | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Adult (18+) Weighted % | Youth (14-17) Weighted % | Adult (18+) Weighted % | Youth (14-17) Weighted % | Adult (18+) Weighted % | Youth (14-17) Weighted % |
| People with Disabilities |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| At Least One Disability | 50.8\*\*\* | 74.4\*\*\* | 15.0\*\*\* | 34.6\*\*\* | 25.8\*\*\* | 33.1\*\*\* |
| Blind/Vision Impaired | 49.9\*\*\* | 63.0\*\*\* | 10.5\*\*\* | 34.6\*\*\* | 30.0\*\*\* | 39.6\*\*\* |
| Cognitive Disability | 73.3\*\*\* | 77.2\*\*\* | 24.4\*\*\* | 36.1\*\*\* | 39.5\*\*\* | 35.8\*\*\* |
| Deaf/Hard of Hearing | 28.0\* | ^ | 7.8\*\*\* | ^ | 15.2\*\*\* | ^ |
| Learning/Intellectual Disability | 65.9\*\*\* | 66.8\*\*\* | 25.4\*\*\* | 29.8\*\*\* | 40.3\*\*\* | 34.3\*\*\* |
| Mobility Disability | 44.0\*\*\* | 75.5\*\*\* | 10.4\*\*\* | 50.8\*\*\* | 21.3\*\*\* | 49.6\*\*\* |
| Self-Care/Independent Living Disability | 65.1\*\*\* | 86.7\*\*\* | 21.9\*\*\* | 55.3\*\*\* | 39.0\*\*\* | 53.4\*\*\* |
| No Disability (*ref*) | 24.4 | 36.3 | 4.5 | 9.0 | 8.4 | 10.3 |

^ Data from groups that have fewer than 30 survey respondents were suppressed.  
\*\*\* p<.0001, \*\* p<.001, \* p<.05 P-values from Pearson chi-square test indicate whether weighted responses from those identifying as specified group significantly differ from those identifying as the noted reference group.

**People with Cognitive Disability**

* About 3 in 4 adults and youth with a cognitive disability reported having high or very high psychological distress.
* 1 in 4 adults and over 1 in 3 youth with a cognitive disability reported suicidal ideation.

**Inequities Spotlight**

**People with a Learning / Intellectual Disability**

* Adults with a learning/intellectual disability were 2.7 times as likely to report high or very high psychological distress and 5.6 times as likely to report suicidal ideation compared to adults without a disability.
* About 4 in 10 adults and 1 in 3 youth with a learning/intellectual disability reported social isolation.

**People with a Self-Care / Independent Living Disability**

* Youth with a self-care/independent living disability were 2.4 times as likely to report high or very high psychological distress compared to youth without a disability.
* Youth with a self-care/independent living disability reported the highest rate of high or very high psychological distress (86.7%), suicidal ideation (55.3%) and social isolation (53.4%) of all disability types.

**Inequities Spotlight**

**Youth with a Mobility Disability**

* 1 in 2 Youth with a mobility disability reported social isolation, which is the second highest among all disability groups.
* 1 in 2 youth with a mobility disability reported suicidal ideation and 3 in 4 had high or very high psychological distress.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The Mental Health of People with Disabilities. Accessed June 2024. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/features/mental-health-for-all.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Lundberg, D, Chen, J. Structural ableism in public health and healthcare: a definition and conceptual framework, The Lancet Regional Health, Volume 30, 100650, February 2024. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2023.100650> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Cree RA, Okoro CA, Zack MM, Carbone E. Frequent Mental Distress Among Adults, by Disability Status, Disability Type, and Selected Characteristics — United States, 2018. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1238–1243. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6936a2> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)