

Behind the Numbers

For a look at more data and discussion, go to pages 43-45, 64 and 67.



Disabilities and Employment

One word that can be used to summarize the Vision of the Positive Living for Special Populations Outcome Team (see sidebar) is “inclusion.” Because employment is a key barometer of inclusion, three of the six indicators currently being tracked under this outcome are related to employment. “People with Developmental Disabilities Competitively Employed” (page 43) and “People with Developmental Disabilities Working in Enclaves” (page 44) are directly related, while “Day-to-day Living for Mentally Ill Adults” (page 45) is indirectly related. The historical trends for these indicators – one is in the desired direction, one is not, and the third is flat – suggest that we are far from achieving this outcome.

While these three indicators capture meaningful information, it is clear that they are restricted to the clients and consumers of specific systems. Therefore, the Outcome Team has for some time been seeking broader measures of inclusion and employment for people with disabilities.

A logical starting place is the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the principal federal source for data and information about the workforce. Unfortunately, the BLS has not included disability status in its reports on the employment status of the U.S. population ... until recently.

In 2009, pursuant to an Executive Order “to measure the employment status of persons with disabilities in aggregate on a timely basis,”¹ the BLS began releasing monthly data for people with disabilities. One of the

statistics it reports is called the **employment-population (e-p) ratio**; the e-p ratio represents the proportion of the civilian noninstitutional population that is employed. According to the BLS, some analysts prefer this measure over the unemployment rate as a measure of economic activity and the economy’s performance.

PLSP Vision

With support from the community, special populations have the opportunity to participate in every aspect of community living that they desire. People with significant disabilities live, learn, work and participate in typical accessible community settings. The community respects and protects their rights and includes them as contributing members.

For our purposes it is an excellent starting point for examining inclusion. The employment-population ratio for people with a disability in the United States in 2009 was 19.2%; for those without a disability it was 64.5%.² (See Figure 1.) The large gap is due to a lower labor force participation³ rate and a higher unemployment rate for persons with a disability. (See Table 1.)

While employment is not a realistic goal for some people with a disability, the differences in all of these rates illustrate the need for continued efforts to achieve inclusion. The Outcome Team will be examining these new data as it seeks broader indicators.

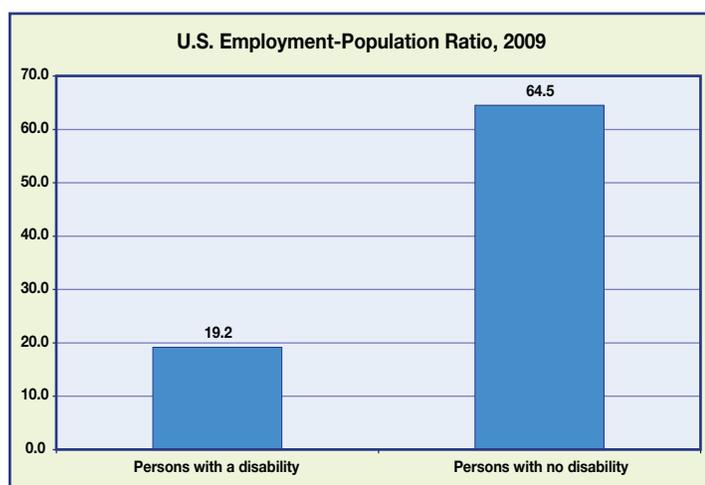


Figure 1. In the United States a person with no disability was over 3 times more likely to be employed in 2009 than a person with a disability. (64.5 / 19.2 = 3.4) (Source: See footnote 2.)

	Persons with a disability	Persons with no disability
Labor force participation rate	22.4%	70.9%
Unemployment rate	14.5%	9.1%

Table 1. These measures of employment status show a wide disparity between persons with and without a disability. (Source: See footnote 2.)

¹ Exec. Order 13078, 63 Fed. Reg. 13111 (March 18, 1998). The ten year interval between the Order and its implementation is worth noting, and is due in part to their efforts to determine the best way to determine disability status during their surveys.

² All the BLS data cited herein are the averages of monthly data for 2009 and are not seasonally adjusted. For 2009, the monthly reports are entitled “Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population by sex, age, and disability status, not seasonally adjusted.” These reports come from the Current Population Survey which uses a set of six questions to learn about people who have physical, mental, or emotional conditions that cause serious difficulty with their daily activities. A response of “yes” to any one of the questions indicates that the person in question has a disability. More information can be found at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsdisability.htm>.

³ A labor force participant is someone who is employed or who is unemployed but available for work and looking for work; people who are discouraged and/or have given up looking for work are not included.