

# Montana Disability & Health Update

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## **Analysis of the combined 2006-2009 BRFSS survey results for disability among American Indian / Alaska Natives** *Montana Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Results*

The Montana Disability and Health Program (MTDH), a partnership of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (MDPHHS) and The University of Montana Rural Institute, involves Montana's service organizations and people with disabilities in collaborative efforts to improve the health of Montanans with disabilities. This report includes the findings of an analysis of data gathered from Montana American Indian and Alaska Native adults with and without disabilities.

### **Procedure**

For more than 25 years, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a national annual telephone survey of non-institutionalized adults, has been used to track health conditions and risk behaviors in the United States. The survey consists of three sections: a section of core questions asked annually; a section of questions that are rotated; and an optional section, which individual states may elect to ask on issues of local significance.

The 2006-2009 combined BRFSS survey asked a total of 1,716 non-institutionalized American Indian and Alaska Native adults the following two questions. Respondents who answered "yes" to at least one of these CDC BRFSS Core Survey questions were identified as having a disability.

- *Are you limited in any way in any activities because of physical, mental or emotional problems?*
- *Do you now have any health problem that requires you to use special equipment, such as a cane, a wheelchair, a special bed or a special telephone?*

### **Findings**

Results indicate that 24.2% of the Montana American Indian and Alaska Native adults surveyed responded "yes" to at least one of the above questions. For the purposes of BRFSS analyses, these respondents are considered to have a disability. By gender, 22.4% of American Indian / Alaska Native men and 25.7% of American Indian / Alaska Native women responded that they had a disability.

When the American Indian / Alaska Native subpopulation is divided into three age groups (18 to 44, 45 to 64, and 65 and over), those ages 45 to 64 are two and a half times as likely to have a disability (38.9%) as those ages 18 to 44 (14.2%); those ages 65 and over are three times as likely to have a disability (48.1%) as those ages 18 to 44. Those ages 45 to 64 are as likely to have a disability (38.9%) as those ages 65 and over (48.1%). When the subpopulation is divided into two age groups, American Indian / Alaska Natives ages 65 and over are twice as likely to have a disability (48.1%) as those ages 18 to 64 (21.7%).

American Indian / Alaska Natives who have not completed high school are as likely to have a disability (25.2%) as those who have completed high school (23.9%), completed some college or technical school (24.2%), or completed college (23.0%).

American Indian / Alaska Natives who earn less than \$15,000 annually (36.3%) are nearly twice as likely to have a disability as those who earn between \$25,000 and \$49,999 annually (18.7%) and three times as likely to have a disability as those who earn between \$50,000 and \$74,999 annually (12.9%). American Indian / Alaska Natives who earn less than \$15,000 annually are as likely to have a disability as those who earn more than \$75,000 annually (22.5%).

Twice as many American Indian / Alaska Natives who have a disability are unable to work or are unemployed (38.0%) compared to those who have a disability but are either self-employed or employed by others (16.0%). Those who have a disability and are unable to work or are unemployed represent as a similar proportion as those with disabilities who are students, homemakers or retired (28.0%).

The combined 2006-2009 BRFSS survey data show that an American Indian / Alaska Native with a disability is as likely to be male as female; is more likely to be over the age of 65 than to be in the age group 18 to 64; and is as likely to have not completed high school as to have a high school diploma, some college experience or to have completed college. An American Indian / Alaska Native with a disability is more likely to earn under \$15,000 annually than to earn between \$25,000 and \$74,999 annually; and is as likely to be unemployed or unable to work as to be a student, a homemaker, or a retiree.

## Conclusion

These data underscore the continued relevance of the US Surgeon General's Call to Action to Improve the Health and Wellness of People with Disabilities, which "encourages health care providers to see and treat the whole person, not just the disability; educators to teach about disability; a public to see an individual's abilities, not just his or her disability; and a community to ensure accessible health care and wellness services for persons with disabilities."<sup>1</sup> The data also inform work outlined in Healthy People 2020.<sup>2</sup> Partners can access updated Montana BRFSS profiles each summer on the State's interactive Web site, where disability is included as a demographic (i.e., in addition to other categories such as age).<sup>3</sup>

*Note: a disparity may exist from having a high percentage of respondents over the age of 65 and a high percentage of respondents unemployed or unable to work. A high percentage of responses of "retired" could be expected within this demographic. This disparity may have been caused by grouping the responses of unemployed and unable to work as a single response to the corresponding demographic question. The possible responses to this question included employed for wages, self-employed, unemployed for more than one year, unemployed for less than one year, a homemaker, a student, retired or unable to work. Another explanation could be a cultural difference between the surveyors' and the respondents' use of the words "retired" and "unable to work."*

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona, retrievable at: [www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/disabilities](http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/disabilities)

<sup>2</sup> <http://healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/overview.aspx?topicid=9>

<sup>3</sup> [http://74.205.72.25/Data/data\\_index.php](http://74.205.72.25/Data/data_index.php)