



What Does It Mean to Have Learning Disabilities in Alberta?

ADULTS 16 TO 21

This profile focuses on young adults aged 16 to 21. People in this group are making decisions about their futures — college, university, the workplace — that will have an impact on the rest of their lives. They are also making the sometimes difficult social transitions from being teenagers to becoming adults.

The data in this section were taken from the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). PALS was a cross-sectional survey that was focused on disability. The PALS sample was selected from those people who answered “yes” to one or more of the disability questions on the 2001 Census of Population long questionnaire.

HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES?

Of those people aged 16 to 21, slightly more than one person in 100 (1.2%) said that they had a learning disability on the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS). Among males aged 16 to 21, the rate was 1.3%; it was slightly lower for females at 1.0%.

Among those young adults who said that they had a learning disability, more than half of them were males (59.4%). Males make up 52.8% of the total population of Alberta.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT SCHOOL?

Thoughts from the Focus Groups

Luck got me through the school system; the school system didn't get me through the school system. I was in the right place at the right time for things to happen.

I got good grades, but inside I knew that I had a problem with reading. At the time, they didn't understand what a learning disability was. Today, people are more able to recognize what a learning disability is.

WHAT THE DATA TELL US

Almost two-thirds of males and females aged 16 to 21 who said that they had a learning disability (62.2%) reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling. The story was somewhat different among the total population of Alberta aged 16 to 21. For this population, 50.4% reported less than a secondary school certificate as their highest level of schooling. Among the total population aged 16 to 21 years, 30.9% reported some post-secondary schooling — either trade or university. Among this same age group that reported learning disabilities, 20% reported some post-secondary education.

Among young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities, 36.1% said that it took them longer to reach their present level of education because of their disabilities.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT AT WORK?

Thoughts from the Focus Groups

I have a tough time filling out applications and my resumé isn't up to par. I can understand why an employer would dismiss my application if there are misspelled words. They are looking for who they think will be the best person for the job.

There's not enough information about learning disabilities in the work force. Employers don't have the information they need. They often see people with learning disabilities as too much of a risk to their businesses.

WHAT THE DATA TELL US

People with learning disabilities aged 16 to 21 were less likely than the total population of the province to have said that they were employed in the week prior to the 2001 Census. The figures were 42.8% and 64.1%, respectively.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON INCOME?

Having a learning disability did have an impact on the amount of income earned by young adults with learning disabilities. Young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — earned less than young adults in the same age group in the total population. 46.8% of those with learning disabilities reported that they had earned between \$1 and \$9,999 and 17.1% reported \$10,000 or more. These

figures were 55.8% and 24.2% respectively among the total population aged 16 to 21.

Just over two-thirds (67.4%) of young adults aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — were not members of low-income families (as calculated using data from the 2001 Census).

According to the *2001 Census Dictionary*, the **low-income cut-off** is defined as the income level at which families or unattached individuals spend 20% more than the average on necessities (i.e., food, shelter and clothing).

This figure was 77.8% for the total population aged 16 to 21.

The data in this section were taken from the 2000 and 2002 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), Cycle 1.2 – Mental Health and Well-being. The CCHS was a cross-sectional survey (it was only done once) that focused, in this cycle, on mental health and well-being. The sample for this survey was selected from the Canadian Labour Force Survey.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON HEALTH?

Almost two-thirds (64.3%) of the survey respondents aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — reported that they thought their health in general was excellent or very good. This figure was slightly higher (67.8%) among the total survey population aged 16 to 21.

When asked about their physical health, more than half (58.7%) of the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — rated their physical health as excellent or very good. The figure was 54.6% for the total population.

Survey respondents were also asked about their mental health. Amongst the population aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities — both sexes — 55.0% said their mental health was either excellent or very good. This figure was higher at 66.8% for the total population aged 16 to 21.

The CCHS also asked respondents about their ability to handle the unexpected problems that can arise. Among both males and females aged 16 to 21 with learning disabilities, 65.1% said that they thought their ability to handle unexpected problems was excellent or very good. Among the total population aged 16 to 21, the figure was less at 53.4%.

When asked about their ability to handle unexpected demands, 80.8% of people with learning disabilities aged 16 to 21 — both sexes — said their ability was either excellent or very good. This figure was 61.9% among the total population aged 16 to 21.