



Appendix 2.7

*Documentation
Disability
Questions*

Currently, there are no standardized requirements for which disability status questions to use. We present three sets of disability status questions. Each question set has 6-8 questions. It is important to note that the categories of disability types in the question sets below do not represent or capture all disabilities. For example, the questions are not specific to Autism Spectrum Disorder or other social communication disabilities, intellectual and developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, and mental health disabilities. Your organization might decide to expand the disability questions, especially if your community has a high prevalence of disabilities not represented in these questions. We recommend including patient response options of “none”, “decline to answer,” and “other disability”. When an “other” disability is indicated, there should be an option for a comment field to write in the disability.

Three Sets of Questions

1. American Community Survey (ACS) Disability Questions
2. Washington Group Disability Questions (modified)
3. Patient-Centered Disability Questionnaire

Regardless of which question set is used, it is important to ask all questions listed within the set to fully capture the patient’s needs. Using the Patient-Centered Disability Questionnaire, our study team tested asking one screener question versus all six disability questions.¹ In the case of the screener question, if a patient answered the question affirmatively, then the staff was instructed to ask the full set of six questions. We found that staff were more likely to ask the screener question than the full set of six questions. We found no difference in the percentage of those who reported a disability between asking only the screener question or the full set. However, more research is needed to confirm whether a screener question truly includes all patients. Therefore, to be comprehensive, the full question set is recommended at this time.

NOTE: These question sets ask about an individual’s functional impairments rather than their disability identity. It can be useful to ask about both a patient’s functional impairment, which provides important information about the individual’s accommodation needs, as well as disability identity, which, similar to asking other demographics questions, provides data to measure outcomes for populations at risk of disparities. This is a rapidly evolving area; research is underway to develop a question set that captures both function and disability identity. For now, we highly recommend using one of the question sets below.

ACS Disability Questions

Following the passage of Section 4302 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommended the use of the American Community Survey (ACS) Disability Questions.² The original intent of the questions was to provide population-level prevalence estimates of disability in the United States.

Benefits of using these questions:

- These are standard questions in disability population surveys in the United States. This allows for interoperability of data across the healthcare system and population surveys.
- The questions are endorsed by HHS and are recommended by the Office for the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, which sets federal standards for electronic health records (EHRs).
- Potential drawbacks:
 - The questions have only been tested in the United States.
 - Several of the questions have long preambles, which might make implementation more challenging.
 - The “doing errands” question will not assist in identifying patients’ accommodation needs in the healthcare setting or the disability(ies) they might represent.
 - These questions do not allow for interoperability and sharing of the data between healthcare systems that use the Washington Group questions.
- These questions have not been tested in a healthcare setting.
 - The questions are not inclusive of all disability types, including communication disabilities.

Washington Group Questions (Modified)

The United Nations Washington Group on Disability Statistics developed a set of six disability status questions. The original intent of the questions was to provide population-level prevalence estimates of disability throughout the world. As such, these questions have been implemented in countries all over the world.³ The original Washington Group questions have multiple response options to indicate the extent of the functional impairment, as opposed to a yes/no response. We recommend using a yes/no response for easiest implementation.

- Benefits of using these questions:
 - The questions have been internationally tested and implemented with linguistically and culturally diverse groups.
 - The questions include a communication disability question.
 - Several of the question wordings are more concise than the ACS questions.
- Potential drawbacks:
 - The questions differ slightly from the ACS questions, meaning they do not allow for interoperability and sharing of the data between healthcare systems and public health data.
 - The questions have not been tested in the healthcare setting.
 - The questions are not inclusive of all disability types.
 - The original questions have multiple response options.

Patient-Centered Disability Questionnaire

The Disability Equity Collaborative team embarked on a series of studies to identify disability status questions to be used in healthcare organizations for the purposes of identifying

patients who require disability accommodations and tracking quality of care at an organization-level.⁴ These studies included a survey, qualitative focus groups and interviews, a national Delphi panel, and cognitive interviews.

- Benefits of using these questions:
 - The questions incorporate aspects of both the ACS and the Washington Group questions.
 - The questions have been tested in the healthcare setting.¹
 - The questions include a communication disability question.
 - The question set includes a general disability question.
- Potential drawbacks:
 - Since the questions are not identical to either the ACS or Washington Group questions, it is not possible to compare the full disability question set to public health data gathered using either of the two other sets of questions.
 - The questions are not inclusive of all disability types.

Chapter 2: Documenting Disability Status and Accommodation Needs

Disability Category	ACS Questions	Washington Group Questions	Patient-Centered Disability Questionnaire
Hearing	Are you deaf or having serious difficulty hearing?	Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid(s)?	Are you deaf, or do you have serious difficulty hearing?
Vision	Are you blind or having serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?	Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?	Are you blind, or do you have serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses?
Cognition	Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, do you have difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions?	Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?	Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
Mobility	Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?	Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?	Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
Activities of Daily Living (ADL) /Fine Motor	Do you have difficulty bathing or dressing?	Do you have difficulty with self-care, such as washing all over or dressing?	Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?
Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL)	Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?		Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, do you have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a physician's office or shopping?
Communication		In your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?	Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating (for example, understanding or being understood)?
General			Due to a disability, do you need any additional assistance or accommodations during your visit?

References

1. Disability Status by Centralized Scheduling. *Joint Commission journal on quality and patient safety*. Oct 2021;47(10):627-636. doi:10.1016/j.jcjq.2021.05.007
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4. Morris MA, Lagu T, Maragh-Bass A, Liesinger J, Griffin JM. Development of Patient-Centered Disability Status Questions to Address Equity in Care. *Joint Commission journal on quality and patient safety*. Dec 2017;43(12):642-650. doi:10.1016/j.jcjq.2017.06.011