



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

Media Release

**CCD Task Force on
Employment and Training**

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Groundbreaking Developments on the Statistics on Unemployment for People with Disabilities

Six disability employment questions included in Current Population Survey

WASHINGTON – Today – On February 6th, for the first time ever, the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics reported official the Current Population Survey (CPS), employment data about people with disabilities. These data have been gathered since June, 2008 when six questions about disability were permanently added to the CPS, a monthly survey the federal government uses to estimate the unemployment level and rate.

We applaud DOL for including six disability questions that will add to the body of knowledge about employment and people with disabilities.

The Current Population Survey is a monthly sample survey of about 60,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The sample is selected to reflect the entire civilian noninstitutional population. Based on responses to a series of questions on work and job search activities, each person 16 years and over in a sample household is classified as employed, unemployed, or not in the labor force. Data on demographic characteristics such as sex, age, and race are also collected. People are classified as unemployed if they had no employment during the reference week (the week containing the 12th of the month); they were available for work at that time; and they made specific efforts to find employment sometime during the 4-week period ending with the reference week. Persons laid off from a job and expecting recall need not be looking for work to be counted as unemployed. The unemployment data derived from the household survey in no way depend upon the eligibility for or receipt of unemployment insurance benefits.

The announcement of the data on February 6th is the culmination of efforts begun with a 1998 Executive Order signed by then President Bill Clinton on increasing employment of adults with disabilities. A number of factors had to be evaluated before data could be calculated on a regular basis. First, disability is a difficult concept to define and, by extension, not easily measured. The testing process had to focus on developing questions that would provide an accurate measure, but at the same time do so with few questions. Using more questions would make measuring disability easier, but might cause more of a burden for survey respondents and cause them to refuse to continue participating. Additionally, the effort to secure funding for the testing process as well as the ongoing costs of asking the questions every month had to be addressed.

The CPS uses a set of six questions to identify persons with disabilities. A response of "yes" to any one of the questions indicates that the person in question has a disability. The disability questions appear in the CPS in the following format:

This month we want to learn about people who have physical, mental, or emotional conditions that cause serious difficulty with their daily activities. Please answer for household members who are 16 years old or over.

- Is anyone deaf or does anyone have serious difficulty hearing?
- Is anyone blind or does anyone have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?
- Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does anyone have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?
- Does anyone have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?
- Does anyone have difficulty dressing or bathing?
- Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does anyone have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

Policymakers need accurate data to determine priorities and funding. Advocates use the information to advocate for greater focus on improving the employment of people with disabilities. Experts who spent considerable time developing and testing the questions believe that they provide accurate, timely data. By describing disability in terms of functional limitations they are able to define a fairly consistent population of people with disabilities. The limitation on the number of questions is challenging and the questions are not perfect. However, the same six questions are also used in other large population based surveys which should help researchers provide more data about the lives of people with disabilities.

Tabulations of employment, unemployment, and labor force participation for people with disabilities will provide important information about how they compare to other populations and trends in this comparison over time. The CPS also collects data to measure underemployment. For example, the CPS provides estimates of the number of persons who are employed part time but would prefer to work full time, as well as the number who are available for work, but have stopped looking for a job because they feel that there is none available for them.

It should not be assumed that if an individual with a disability is ready to work but not looking for work that the individual is not interested in employment. Unfortunately, all too often

systems intended to support him or her in entering employment have failed in achieving this goal. These system's shortcomings must be rectified by policymakers so that all individuals with disabilities are empowered to participate in our nation's labor force. Having people with disabilities included in the official count will provide important information about who is currently look for work, how people with disabilities who are looking for work compare to other populations, and of employment trends over time. However, it will not provide insight into people who are out of the labor force or working very little, which is of significant concern to the disability community.

A secondary issue in using the monthly employment statistic is the definition of disability. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has been clear that the Current Population Survey was not designed to measure disability. The questions currently used are broad in scope, including both health and disability, it relies on the individual to define whether their condition prevents them from working. Someone who is employed may answer very differently from someone who is unemployed but has a similar disability.

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The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a working coalition of more than 100 national non-profit disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society