



IRIS

Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society  
Institut de recherche et de développement sur l'intégration et la société

# People with Learning Difficulties: A Demographic Snapshot

*Researched and written by  
Cameron Crawford  
Director of Research, IRIS*



**People with Learning Difficulties:  
A Demographic Snapshot**

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Crawford, Cameron

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Cameron Crawford

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Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society (IRIS)  
Kinsmen Building, York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto (North York), Ontario M3J 1P3  
Tel: (416) 661-9611  
Fax (416) 661-5701  
TDD: (416) 661-2023  
[www.irisinstitute.ca](http://www.irisinstitute.ca)

*Researcher and Author*  
Cameron Crawford

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The Institute for Research and Development on Inclusion and Society (IRIS) provides research, new ways of thinking, inspiration and education to advance the citizenship, inclusion, human rights and well-being of people with intellectual and other disabilities. It builds on the legacy L'Institut Roehrer Institute. IRIS is an independent Canadian research, policy, social development and educational think tank for the community living movement in collaboration with the broader disability community.

IRIS' specific areas of research and resource development are: social inclusion and life beyond institutions; disability-related supports; education, literacy and learning; child development and family life; human rights, ethics and technology; personal safety and security, employment and income; social policy and change.

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- Liaises and collaborates with other experts;
- Analyzes the social and economic realities facing people with intellectual and other disabilities and gives voice to their lived experiences;
- Links issues of disability to broader research, policy, program and social development issues and agendas;
- Attracts and develops skilled researchers and analysts;
- Distributes others' research and resources that warrant positive attention;
- Provides a broad Canadian perspective and in-depth coverage;
- Ensures its research is non-partisan, objective and meets the highest quality standards;
- Points to supportive policy and program options; and
- Helps move research and new knowledge into action through seminars, presentations, training and other knowledge mobilization strategies.

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## **I. Overview**

The purpose of this research is to provide policy-relevant baseline information that will inform public policy regarding the population of people with learning and/or developmental disabilities. It explores selected demographic and other characteristics of adults 15 years and older classified as having 'learning difficulties'. It draws from Statistics Canada's 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), the research literature and other documentation and insights gathered from community-based experience. The report generally focuses on people residing in households (i.e., non-institutionalized).

The report begins with a discussion of the operational definition of 'disability' in PALS and the formal and operational definitions of 'learning disability' and 'developmental disability'. These two sub-populations together comprise the group that this report defines as people with 'learning difficulties'. The report provides prevalence estimates for these sub-populations.

The report then provides basic demographic information, including age, gender, economic family status, province of residence and size of community, visible minority and immigration status, and aboriginal person status. The report goes on to explore issues of education, employment and income, help with everyday activities, health, personal control in decision-making and participation in leisure activities in the community.

Where feasible the report compares the situation of people with learning and developmental difficulties against the entire PALS adult population with and without disabilities. Where possible it also provides details separately for people with 'learning disabilities' and 'developmental disabilities'.

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## **II. Defining Terms**

### **A. Formal and Operational Definitions of Disability**

PALS is Statistics Canada's 'flagship' survey on disability issues. Its approach to disability is loosely based on the World Health Organization (WHO)'s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). The ICF views disability as the interrelationship between body functions, activities and social participation, while recognizing the role of the environment as providing barriers or facilitators.

In operationalizing its approach to disability, PALS collected data on ten types of functional limitation: hearing, seeing, speech, mobility, agility, learning, developmental disability or disorder, psychological, memory limitation and chronic pain. Respondents included in PALS are a sample of those who first answered "yes" on the Census Long Form to: a) having any difficulty hearing, seeing, communicating, walking, climbing stairs, bending, learning or doing any similar activities; or b) having a physical condition or mental condition or health problem that reduces the amount or the kind of activity they can do at home, school, work or in other activities such as transportation or leisure.

A weighted population estimate of about 90,000 people are flagged as answering "yes" to the Census questions and "no" to the questions about specific areas of functioning in PALS; these respondents are classified as having a disability that is "unknown" in PALS (Statistics Canada, 2002b).

### **B. Formal Definitions of Learning Disability and Developmental Disability**

The focus of the present research is on people with learning difficulties. This group consists of people flagged as having a 'learning disability' *or* 'developmental disability'. Although there is some overlap these are not entirely the same populations and are defined quite differently in the research literature and operationally in PALS.

In Canada the term 'developmental disability' is often used interchangeably with 'developmental delay', 'intellectual disability' and, in years past, 'mental handicap' and 'mental retardation'. In the United States the term 'mental retardation' is still used quite widely, although a shift in terminology has begun in that country as well.

While these terms are often used interchangeably, 'intellectual disability' *or* 'mental retardation' is technically distinct from other 'developmental disabilities' (see The Arc, 2004). In the United States, 'developmental disabilities' are defined in the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of

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Rights Act of 2000 (PL 106-402-Oct. 30, 2000) and include any severe, chronic disability attributable to a mental *or physical* impairment, with age of onset before 22 years, that is likely to continue indefinitely and that results in (or, for children birth to 9 years is likely to result in) substantial functional limitations in three or more major life activities. Such activities are: self care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity for independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. The legislation also includes that the individual will likely rely on ongoing supportive services.

Generally, definitions of developmental disability that involve concurrent cognitive limitations connote long-term conditions with onset before 18 years that involve *significant* cognitive limitations as ascertained by standardized intelligence tests *and* difficulties in at least two everyday activities that most people can undertake without major trouble, such as communication, self-care, home living, social skills, community use, self-direction, maintaining health and safety, functional academics, leisure and work (AAMR, 1993).

'Learning disabilities' connote a more tightly defined range of cognitive difficulties that are not necessarily associated with significantly lower than average cognitive functioning (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2004). Categories of difficulty include reading disabilities (dyslexia), written language disabilities (dysgraphia), math disabilities (dyscalculia) and related disabilities that affect memory, social skills, and executive functions such as deciding to begin a task.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (LDAC) uses the following categories (2005b):

- Visual Problems: poor visual memory, reversals in writing
- Auditory Problems: poor auditory memory, speech problems
- Motor Problems: poor hand-eye coordination
- Organizational Problems: poor ability in organizing time or space
- Conceptual Problems: poor social skills and peer relations, difficulty correctly interpreting non-verbal language.

The recent definition used by the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2006) puts distance between the notion of 'learning disabilities' on the one hand and developmental disability as defined in the present paper, for which the LDAC uses the phrase "global intellectual deficiency":

"Learning Disabilities" refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

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Similarly, the recently amended *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* in the United States (Congress of United States of America, 1997) defines specific learning disability distinct from developmental disability as follows:

(26) SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITY-

(A) IN GENERAL- The term 'specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

(B) DISORDERS INCLUDED- Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

(C) DISORDERS NOT INCLUDED- Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

**C. Operational Definitions of Learning Disability and Developmental Disability in PALS**

On the basis of PALS, Statistics Canada (2002b) operationally defined people with a 'learning disability' as those who answered "yes" to question B77 or B78 of the survey questionnaire:

B77. Do you think you have (Does . . . . think he /she has) a condition that makes it difficult in general for you (him/her) to learn? Such conditions include attention problems, hyperactivity, dyslexia and others.

B78. Has a teacher, doctor or other health professional ever said that you (. . . .) had a learning disability?

People with a 'developmental disability' are operationally defined as people who answered "yes" to question B88:

B88. Has a doctor, psychologist or other health professional ever said that you (. . . .) had a developmental disability or disorder? These include, for example, Down syndrome, autism, Asperger syndrome, mental impairment due to a lack of oxygen at birth, etc.

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## **D. Prevalence Estimates**

### ***1. Prevalence Estimates Widely Used***

Prevalence estimates vary for learning disability and developmental disability.

For learning disability, estimates can depend on age group, gender, genetics, the context in which learning disability is ascertained (e.g., formal and informal educational and workplace training settings; literacy programs; correctional facilities) and the specific type of learning disability in question (e.g., reading, numeracy, Attention Deficit Disorder). For instance, a recent study found a prevalence of 11% of various combinations of specific learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Disorder among school-aged children 6 to 11 years (Pastor & Reuben, 2002).

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada (2006) estimates a prevalence of 10% and other prevalence rates that are widely used range around 15% of the general population.

Prevalence estimates of developmental disability also range considerably, from about 0.6% to about 3% of the general population. The figures depend on the methods and criteria of assessment that are used; Horwitz et al. (2000) provide a helpful discussion. Some people believe that the 3% figure is based on misleading mortality rates; cases that are diagnosed in early infancy; and the instability of the diagnosis across the age span (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2005). However, The Arc, which is a large advocacy organization with a focus on developmental disability in the United States, points out that, based on IQ score alone, the prevalence would be close to 3% (The Arc, 2004).

While there are no 'official' data for Canada, Bradley et al. (2002) recently found a prevalence rate of 7.18 per thousand in Ontario (about 0.7%), a figure similar to prevalence in Scandinavian countries but that the researchers believed probably understates the actual prevalence.

Figures typically used by governments in Canada and the United States range from about 1% (British Columbia, 2001) to 3% of the general population (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An official from the Ontario Developmental Services Branch of the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Ontario told The Roeher Institute in 2001 that the Branch estimated a total of about 90,000 people with developmental disabilities in that province. That figure works out to about 1% of the total population. In contrast, a senior government official who worked in developmental services in Alberta recently told The Roeher Institute that Alberta was using prevalence estimates that ranged from about 2% to 2.5%.

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## ***2. Prevalence Estimates Based on PALS***

In its public reporting, Statistics Canada (2002) has estimated that 451,420 adults have learning disabilities, i.e., they answered “yes” to either B77 or B78. That number represents about 1.9% of the adult household population in Canada. This under-reporting of learning disabilities in PALS may be due partly to the stigma associated with this condition and survey respondents’ reluctance to self-report. In many instances, however, learning disabilities simply go undetected (LD Online, 2006). As well, some people who have a learning disability may not have considered their activities to have been limited enough to answer “yes” to one of the Census disability filters, a precondition for being selected into PALS.

Statistics Canada classified 120,140 adults as having a developmental disability, i.e., they responded “yes” to B88 (Statistics Canada, 2002b), which works out to about 0.5% of the adult household population in Canada. The PALS estimate is well below those reported elsewhere and is likely due to under reporting. As pointed out in a recent report by the Surgeon General of the United States (2002), the condition of most people with developmental disabilities is “relatively mild, and once they leave school, they disappear into larger communities, untracked in major national data sets”. In the Canadian context, we may well be dealing with the same challenge of not being able to capture many, and perhaps even most, people with mild levels of developmental disability in a survey such as PALS; some may not have answered “yes” to any of the Census disability filters, e.g., because they had necessary social supports and so did not consider themselves to be limited in their activities. Then again, the stigma associated with this disability (The Arc, 2004) may have deterred some people from self-reporting in PALS.

## ***3. Overlap of Learning and Developmental Disability***

While learning and developmental disability are distinct notions, the conceptual separation of these conditions is a fairly recent phenomenon and in practice there is considerable overlap. As recently as 1994 the US National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities said:

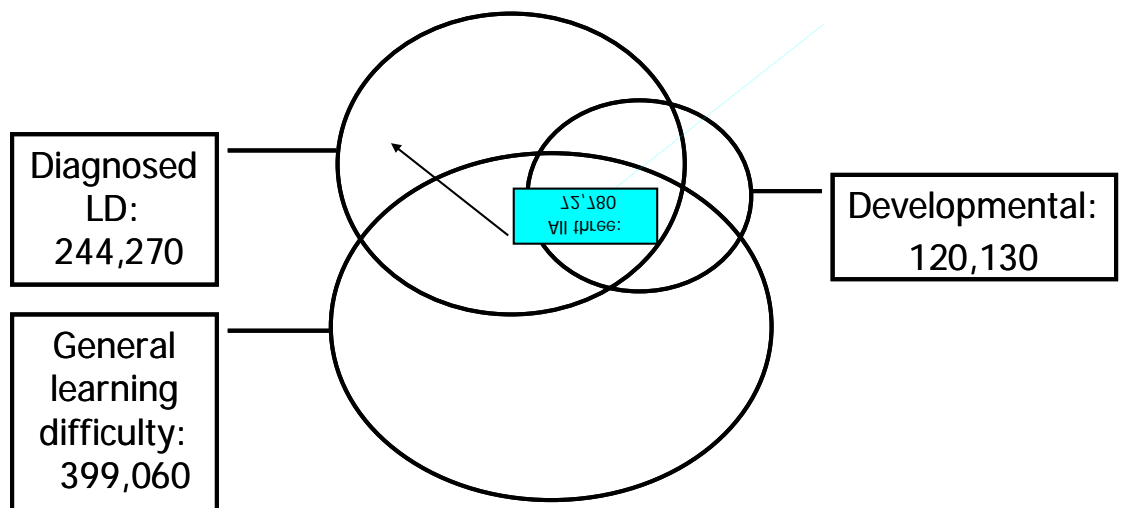
...individuals with other handicapping conditions, such as mental retardation, sensory impairments, autism, or severe emotional or behavioral disturbances may have concomitant learning disabilities.

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the overlap of those reporting a learning or developmental disability in PALS 2001. Based on PALS, a total of 475,130 adults have either disability.

**Table 1: Weighted responses to PALS 2001 questions B77, B78 and B88 (rounded to nearest 10)**

B77 only	194,090	}	Learning
B78 only	41,740		
B77 and B78 only	119,150	}	Developmental
B77 and B88 only	13,040		
B78 and B88 only	10,600		
B77 and B78 and B88	72,780	}	Developmental
B88 only	23,710		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>475,130</b>		

**Figure 1. Overlap of learning disability and developmental disability in PALS 2001**



It will be observed that most people who indicated the presence of a developmental disability also indicated having a learning disability (80.3%). In contrast, relatively few who reported a learning disability also reported having a developmental disability (21.4%).

Intuitively, these reporting patterns make sense. People with a 'developmental disability' are generally considered to have significant difficulties in a range of cognitive and other practical tasks. It is perhaps to be expected that

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most who self-reported this condition in PALS also considered themselves to have some level of difficulty learning.

It is also understandable that some people with a developmental disability reported a learning disability if they were assessed as having – or if they considered themselves to have – both conditions. As discussed above, the clear distinction now drawn between these conditions is a fairly recent development.

That relatively few people with learning disabilities reported a developmental disability is likely due to diagnosis of the former rather than the latter condition, avoidance of stigma associated with the latter or a combination of these factors.



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### III. General Demographics

The present research groups together people with learning and/or developmental disabilities – an estimated 475,130 people based on PALS. For the sake of convenience the shorthand term ‘people with learning difficulties’ is used to refer to this diverse population.

When speaking of the sub-groups separately, the research uses the terms ‘LD as defined by Statistics Canada’ or ‘LD’ to indicate people with learning disabilities. The research uses the terms ‘developmental’ or ‘DD’ to connote developmental disability. The research generally refers to the entire PALS population with a disability as people with ‘any disability’.

#### A. Gender

In the non-disabled adult population in Canada, 49.3% are men and 50.7% are women (Table 1). Among people with learning difficulties, 54.8% are men and 45.2% are women. Given that people with LD comprise the largest share of this group, the latter finding is consistent with recent research literature that reports the prevalence of LD roughly the same among men as women (LDAC, 2005a).

<b>Disability status</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Non-disabled	49.3%	50.7%
Any disability	44.6%	55.4%
Learning difficulties	54.8%	45.2%
- DD	61.4%	38.6%
- LD	54.6%	45.4%

Looking specifically at those classified as having LD in PALS, 54.6% are men and 45.4% are women.

Among those with developmental disabilities, however, 61.4% are men and 38.6% women. That finding is consistent with other research that shows a high proportion of males in this population. In ruling out single chromosomal factors as accounting for the differences, Mandel and Chelly (2004) have suggested that “gender differences in fetal brain development may make the male brain more susceptible to early brain damage, and/or there may be gene polymorphisms on the X [chromosome] that subtly affect cognitive abilities, but without causing overt MR [mental retardation] in most of the cases... [until] associated with predisposing genetic [factors] ... or environmental conditions.”

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## B. Age

Table 2 shows that the likelihood of disability increases with age. Thus, on the one hand, 37.0% of people with no disability are aged 15-34 and 10.7% are 65 and over, while, on the other hand, 10.3% of people with disabilities are 15 to 35 and 42.4% are aged 65 or older.. In part this finding is likely due to the strong relationship between the aging process and onset of disability.

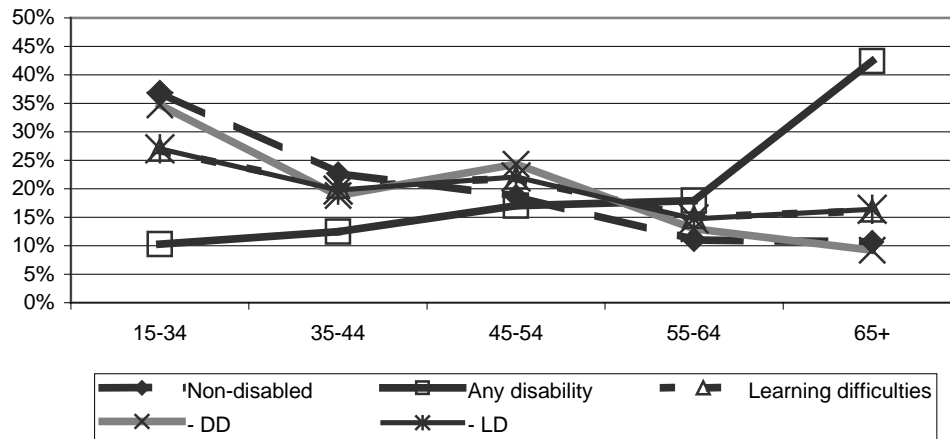
**Table 2. Age by disability status**

Disability status	Age groups					Total count
	15-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	
Non-disabled	37.0%	22.7%	18.7%	11.0%	10.7%	20,025,410
Any disability	10.3%	12.5%	17.0%	17.9%	42.4%	3,420,340
Learning difficulties	26.8%	20.3%	21.9%	15.0%	16.1%	475,130
- DD	34.7%	18.8%	24.3%	13.0%	9.2%	120,140
- LD	27.0%	19.8%	22.1%	14.7%	16.4%	451,420

The table also shows that people with learning difficulties tend to be younger than people with disabilities as a whole; relatively few with learning difficulties are 65 years and older (16.1% compared with 42.4%) and more are in the 15 to 34 age group (26.8% compared with 10.3%). Generally, as people get older they are more susceptible to various forms of disability. In contrast, learning disabilities and developmental disabilities are acquired early in the lifespan.

Chart 1 shows the same information as presented on Table 2. Of some interest, the age distribution of people with developmental disabilities mirrors quite closely the age distribution of the non-disabled population. This finding is consistent with reports that indicate much the same life expectancy for this population as for the general population in recent years and much the same in terms of age-related health and other complications (AAMR 2005; Horwitz et al. 2000; Harum 2006).

**Chart 1. Age by disability status**



Focusing only on the working-age population, Table 3 again shows that the age distributions for people with developmental disabilities are similar to those without disabilities. In contrast, people with LD tend to be somewhat older than the non-disabled population, with only 32.2% compared with 41.4% in the 15 to 34 age group and 17.6% versus 12.3% in the 55 to 64 age group.

Disability status	Age groups				Total count
	15-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	
Non-disabled	41.4%	25.4%	20.9%	12.3%	17,889,850
Any disability	17.8%	21.7%	29.5%	31.0%	1,968,490
Learning difficulties	31.9%	24.2%	26.1%	17.8%	398,730
- DD	38.2%	20.7%	26.8%	14.3%	109,060
- LD	32.2%	23.7%	26.5%	17.6%	377,410

### C. Multiple Disabilities

Table 4 shows that people with learning difficulties are likely in many cases to report another disability in addition to a learning disability or developmental disability. It shows that people with learning disabilities are as likely to experience agility, mobility, pain and hear impairments as others with disabilities. They are through, slightly more likely to experience sight loss and much more likely to experience speech, memory and psychiatric impairments.

With regard to memory loss, the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada's definition of learning disabilities includes difficulties in the area of memory or attention (LDAC, 2006). Wyatt & Connors (1998) have also found that difficulties with some memory tasks are widespread among people with developmental disabilities.

**Table 4. Extent of multiple disabilities by disability status**

<b>Nature of specific disability</b>	<b>Persons with any disability reporting other specific disabilities</b>	<b>Persons with learning difficulties reporting other specific disabilities</b>
Agility	66.6%	67.3%
Mobility	71.7%	69.7%
Pain	69.5%	66.7%
Hearing	30.4%	30.9%
Seeing	17.4%	25.3%
Speech	10.6%	37.6%
Memory	12.3%	41.7%
Psychiatric	15.3%	42.0%

With regard to the large percentage of people with learning difficulties who also have psychiatric disabilities (42.0% compared with 15.3% of people with any disability) – that finding resonates with other research that has reported quite pervasive mental health difficulties among people with learning disabilities (LDAC 2005a) and among people with developmental disabilities (Horwitz et al. 2000).

Further, difficulties with spoken communication are more prevalent among people with learning difficulties (37.6%) than among people with disabilities more generally (10.6%). Difficulties with spoken and receptive communication are included among the 'adaptive behaviours' that are taken into account in the assessment of 'mental retardation' or developmental disability as defined in the present research (AAMR, 2006). Specific learning disabilities can also affect oral language, e.g. listening, speaking and understanding (LDAC, 2006).

#### **D. Severity of Disability**

The present study was unable to find consistent approaches in the research and scholarly literature to assessing and reporting severity of disability among people with learning disabilities.

In contrast, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, text revision (American Psychiatric Association, 2000), which is

the diagnostic standard for mental healthcare professionals in the United States, classifies four different degrees of ‘mental retardation’: mild, moderate, severe, and profound. These categories are based on the person's level of functioning. That classification scheme places approximately 85% of the ‘mentally retarded’ population in the mildly disabled category, i.e., IQ ranging from 55 to 70.

Statistics Canada’s global severity scale is based, essentially, on the range and intensity of disabilities that PALS respondents reported in various contexts (Faucher, 2002). A very severe level of disability generally connotes difficulties across several areas of functioning (e.g., mobility, communication, memory, learning) or major difficulty in a single area.

Table 5 shows the severity level of disability for people with any disability and those with learning difficulties. Compared with the PALS disabled population as a whole, those with learning difficulties are much more likely to have severe or very severe levels of disability and much less likely to have a mild level of disability. In part this finding is an effect of the greater likelihood of multiple disabilities among people with learning difficulties. Compared with the broad PALS population with any disability, people with learning difficulties have, on average, impairments in 5 versus 3 domains of functioning.

**Table 5. Severity of disability by selected type of disability**

Type of disability	Degree of disability			
	Mild	Moderate	Severe	Very severe
Any disability	34.1%	25.0%	26.9%	14.0%
Learning difficulties	11.3%	16.4%	32.2%	40.0%
- DD	8.2%	18.3%	30.8%	42.7%
- LD	11.2%	15.8%	32.0%	41.0%

### **E. Cause of Disability**

Table 6 shows that people with learning difficulties are considerably less likely than those with any disability to say that the cause of their disability is aging (6.1% versus 15.7%) or work conditions (9.8% versus 15.2%). They are more likely to attribute their disability to stress (6.8% versus 3.9%), auto accidents (6.3% versus 4.4%) and to various ‘other’ factors not listed in detail on the table (49.4% versus 34.9%).

When various ‘other’ causes are removed from the analysis, the differences in causal attribution for people with learning difficulties and any disability are more pronounced. Here, people with learning difficulties are about twice as likely to report that their condition was caused by stress or auto accidents and about half as likely to say that the cause of their disability was aging.

Other studies have found that stress and anxiety are more prevalent among people with LD than with other disabilities (LDAC, 2005a). Brain injury stemming from auto and other accidents can result in a variety of cognitive difficulties, including specific learning disabilities if global intellectual functioning is not impaired and developmental disability if the injury is sustained early in life.

<b>Primary cause</b>	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>
Disease/Illness	22.5%	19.8%
Aging	15.7%	6.1%
Work Conditions	15.2%	9.8%
Stress	3.9%	6.8%
Home Accident	2.0%	1.2%
Automobile Accident	4.4%	6.3%
Sports Accident	1.2%	0.6%
Various other	34.9%	49.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## **F. Geographic Distribution**

Table 7 shows the adult disability rates and the rates of adult learning difficulties by geographic region. These rates are defined as the share of the total adult population in a given region with any disability or with learning difficulties. Learning difficulties are more prevalent than the national average in all regions except Quebec and Alberta. With the exception of Quebec, however, the variances are not major. A recent study found that Quebecers hold significantly different opinions than people outside of Quebec concerning, among other matters, how disabilities are defined (Environics, 2004). Such perceptual differences may help account for the relatively low disability and learning difficulty rates in Quebec.

Table 7 also shows the ratio of learning difficulties to any disability (i.e., percentage with learning difficulties ÷ percentage with any disability). When looking at the ratios, Quebec falls at the upper end of the range. The ratio is lowest in Atlantic Canada.

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**Table 7. Regional distribution by disability status (adults 15 years+)**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Disability as % of provincial total</b>	<b>Learning difficulties as % of provincial total</b>	<b>Ratio of learning difficulties to any disability</b>
Atlantic	17.5%	2.1%	0.120
Quebec	9.8%	1.5%	0.153
Ontario	16.0%	2.3%	0.144
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	17.1%	2.2%	0.129
Alberta	14.8%	1.9%	0.128
British Columbia	16.3%	2.2%	0.135
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.6%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>0.137</b>

The percentages living in rural communities and in urban communities of 100,000 to 500,000 people are similar regardless of disability status, i.e., ranging from 20% to 21.1% in rural communities and 12.3% to 13.5% in the mid-sized urban communities, as shown on Table 8.

**Table 8. Distribution by rural/urban, size of community and disability status**

<b>Rural/Urban Size</b>	<b>Disability status</b>		
	<b>Non-disabled</b>	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>
Rural	20.0%	20.7%	21.1%
Small urban: <100,000	20.2%	25.3%	27.3%
Mid-sized urban: 100,000 to 500,000	12.3%	13.5%	13.5%
Large urban: 500,000+	47.6%	40.5%	38.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Focusing on people with learning difficulties, however, they are more likely (at 27.3%) than non-disabled people (20.2%) to live in small urban communities with fewer than 100,000 people. In contrast, people with learning difficulties are less likely than those without disabilities (38.1% compared with 47.6%) to live in large urban communities of 500,000 or more people.

The reasons for these findings are not immediately clear. The differences may in part be related to the availability and 'mix' of informal supports available in various regions of the country and in communities of various sizes. For example, people with learning difficulties may experience a more favourable 'mix' of available supports in smaller rather than large urban communities.

## G. Aboriginal Person Status

The Census of 2001 reported some 652,345 Aboriginal persons 15 years and older (Statistics Canada, 2006c). The data on Aboriginal status shown on Table 9 are for people living off First Nations reserves. The table shows that a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal adults have learning or developmental disabilities (4.7% compared with 2% among non-Aboriginal adults).

<b>Disability Status</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>	<b>Count</b>
Non-aboriginal	2.0%	457,560
Aboriginal	4.7%	17,570

## H. Visible Minority and Immigrant Status

Among non-disabled adults in Canada, 13.5% are from visible minority communities. Relatively few people with any disability are from visible minorities (6.9%) and fewer still of those with learning difficulties (5.1%).

A review of Table 10 shows that very few people with any disability (2.5%) or with learning difficulties (1.8%) immigrated to Canada in the ten-year period prior to the 2001 Census. In contrast, 7% of non-disabled Canadians immigrated to Canada in that decade. In part the low prevalence of learning difficulties among visible minorities may be an effect of challenges such people face gaining entry to Canada (Data Probe & Spector, 2006).

<b>Year of immigration</b>	<b>Disability status</b>		
	<b>Non-disabled</b>	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>
1996 - 2001	3.6%	0.6%	0.4%*
1991-1995	3.4%	1.9%	1.4%*
1981-1990	4.5%	2.8%	1.8%*
1900-1980	9.6%	18.3%	10.9%
Non-immigrant	78.9%	76.5%	85.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Any immigration	21.1%	23.5%	14.5%
Any immigration 1991-2001	7.0%	2.5%	1.8%

\*High sampling variability. Use figures with caution.



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## IV. Living Arrangements and Housing

### A. Living Arrangements

The proportion of people with any disability who are in marital or common-law relationships is similar to that for people without disabilities; more than half are in such relationships (53.7% and 58.4% respectively – Table 11). However, considerably less than half of people with learning or developmental disabilities are in such relationships (39.2%).

**Table 11. Economic family status and disability status of adults**

Family Status	Disability Status		
	No disability	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Partner	58.4%	53.7%	39.2%
Lone-parent	4.5%	7.4%	7.4%
Other related person	3.3%	5.9%	4.6%
Child	18.1%	6.4%	22.1%
Non-family person	15.8%	26.6%	26.7%
<b>Total</b>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In contrast to non-disabled adults, more typical of the population with learning difficulties is for them to be ‘non-family’ persons, i.e., living alone or with other non-family members in shared living arrangements (26.6% compared with 15.8%).

As well, the prevalence of lone-parenthood is higher among people with learning difficulties (7.4% compared with 4.5% of non-disabled adults).

More nuanced is the situation of people classified as never married adult children living with one or both parents, i.e., ‘child’ on Table 11. Here, 18.1% of the non-disabled population are so classified compared with 6.4% with any disability. This finding makes sense in that disability tends to become more prevalent as people age and that most people who sustain a disability are likely to do so at some point in adulthood, that is, after they leave the parental home.

For people with learning difficulties, the pattern is not so clear. Table 11 (above) shows that this group tends to be younger than the PALS universe of people with disabilities but somewhat older than the non-disabled adult population. Yet there are proportionately more people with learning difficulties (22.1%) than without disabilities (18.1%) living at home with one or both parents. Lack of supportive community services, difficulties securing affordable housing and other such issues may be factors that deter or make it impracticable for many adults with learning difficulties to make the transition from the parental home to other living

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arrangements (Joint Developmental Services Sector Partnership Table, 2004: 1, 14; British Columbia, Ministry for Children and Family Development, 2002: 2, 12, 29-30; Crawford, 2004a; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2006).

Emerson (1999) has pointed out that the ability to effectively support adults with developmental disabilities will become increasingly important as the demand for community living arrangements rises in the next decade. Demographic factors contributing to this demand include: increased prevalence of people with developmental disabilities from the baby boom generation who are currently cared for by elderly parents; increased life expectancy and lower mortality rates; and increased survival rates of young people with severe and complex disabilities.

## **B. Housing Models**

Group homes dominate as the standard model of formal care for people with developmental disabilities in the U.S., Australia, and Canada (Stancliffe, 2005; Braddock et al., 2001; Taylor, 2001; Crawford, 2005a). Research has found that residents in smaller arrangements fare better than residents in larger, multi-person arrangements. Positive features of small group homes include: access to larger social networks with more people who are not staff or family; social networks comprising fewer individuals with developmental disabilities; and higher numbers of unpaid social support (Emerson et al., 2001).

However, multiple problems have been associated with group home arrangements regardless of their size, including: inflexible schedules; high levels of staffing; incompatibility/disputes among residents; inability to adapt to residents' changing needs/preferences; low levels of personal choice and autonomy regarding group activities and decisions; and availability not keeping pace with increases in demand. Research indicates that some individuals residing in group homes do not require such high levels of support and may demonstrate better outcomes, at lower cost, by living semi-independently (Emerson et al., 2001; Howe, Horner & Newton, 1998; Stancliffe, 2005; Stancliffe & Keane, 2000).

Canada Mortgage and Housing (2006) recently found significant unmet need for suitable housing for adults with developmental disabilities. That research found that the present 'system' seldom plans for a smooth transition from the family home to a more independent living environment. The gap is due to lack of funding for physical facilities and supports. Often, individuals are housed where space is available, rather than in residences suited to their specific needs.

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### C. Housing Tenure

Consistent with the finding that people with learning difficulties are more likely than non-disabled persons to be living as ‘non-family’ persons, their housing is more likely (39.1%) than that of non-disabled persons (26.4%) to be rented rather than owned by someone in the same household (Table 12).

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Non-disabled</b>	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>
Owned	73.6%	68.3%	60.9%
Rented	26.4%	31.7%	39.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### D. Housing Adequacy

Table 13 shows the extent of housing adequacy by disability status. Inadequate housing is defined as housing in need of major repairs (defective plumbing or electrical wiring, structural repairs to walls, floors or ceilings, etc.) People with any disability are more likely than those without disabilities to live in inadequate housing (10.5% compared with 7.2%), all the more so if they have learning difficulties (14.6%).

<b>Disability status</b>	<b>Housing adequacy</b>	
	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Non-disabled	7.2%	92.8%
Any disability	10.5%	89.5%
Learning difficulties	14.6%	85.4%

### E. Home Modifications

More than two-thirds of people with learning difficulties also have disabilities in the areas of mobility or agility. Not surprisingly, then, a significant number of people in this group (70,390) have or need one or more modifications to their personal residences to ensure physical accessibility.

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## V. Education

### A. Education Level

The low level of employment and low incomes among people with disabilities are in part the results of their comparatively low educational attainment (Crawford, 2004b; Fawcett, 1996). Some 46.8% of people with disabilities had less than high school graduation when PALS was conducted (Table 14) compared with 28.4% without disabilities. More than half (52.4%) of people with learning difficulties had less than high school graduation – 52.1% among people with LD as defined by Statistics Canada and 69.7% among people with developmental disabilities.

<b>Disability status</b>	<b>Less than high school graduation</b>	<b>High school graduation</b>	<b>Any post-secondary</b>
Non-disabled	28.4%	18.1%	53.4%
Any disability	46.8%	15.9%	37.3%
Learning difficulties	52.4%	15.4%	32.2%
- DD	69.7%	16.2%	14.2%
- LD	52.1%	15.1%	32.8%

Owing to low frequencies, detailed information cannot be shown about the highest level of post-secondary education attained by people with developmental disabilities. However, only 14.2% have any post-secondary education – less than half the rate for people with learning difficulties as a whole (32.2%) and with LD in particular (32.8%). In contrast, 37.3% of people with disabilities more broadly have at least some post-secondary education, as do 53.4% of adults without disabilities.

Those with university degrees respectively make up 7.9% and 16.8% of the disabled and non-disabled adult populations. People with university degrees comprise only 4.3% of adults with learning difficulties (not shown on Table 14).

## B. Supports for Education

Some 12.2% of working-age people with learning difficulties were attending school, or had attended school at some point in the 5 years prior to PALS, and needed at least one of the supports for education shown on Table 15. This was the case for only 4.5% of people with any disability.

People with learning difficulties' more pervasive need of various educational supports is in part a function of the greater severity of their disabilities which in turn is partly a function of the relatively high number of impairments they reported in PALS.

Having access to the supports needed is likely a necessary condition of attending school for many people facing such needs. Accordingly, most people with learning difficulties with such needs had the necessary support (65.4%), which was also the case for most with a disability more broadly and such needs (69.6%).

	Any need (met or unmet)		Of those with any needs, % with needs fully met	
	Any disability	Learning difficulties	Any disability	Learning difficulties
<b>Supports for education</b> Use or need a least one of the supports listed	4.5%	12.2%	69.6%	65.4%
<b>Physical accessibility measures:</b> At least one of: accessible classrooms, washrooms, residences, other buildings, accessible transportation, other feature or service	2.8%	7.6%	87.5%	92.9%
<b>Human supports:</b> At least one of: note takers or readers, tutor or teacher's aid, sign language interpreter, attendant care services	2.4%	6.3%	78.6%	57.6%
<b>Specialized aids/devices and other equipment:</b> At least one of: computer with Braille, talking books, magnifiers or CCTVs, Braille or large print reading materials, recording equipment or portable notetakers, other aids or services	1.0%	8.9%	55.0%	76.6%

Generally, physical accessibility measures seem to be more widely available to people who need these than are the other supports. For instance, 92.9% with learning difficulties who need such features have those available, as do 87.5% of students with any disabilities who require such measures.

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In contrast, less widely available are human supports. Here, human support is available to only 57.6% of those with learning difficulties who need such assistance but to 78.6% of those with any disability.

Also less widely available are specialized aids/devices and other equipment, and again, on a considerably less than equal basis. In contrast to human supports, however, specialized aids/devices and other equipment are *more* available to people with learning difficulties who need such technologies and *less* available to people with disabilities more generally, i.e., to 76.6% and 55% respectively.

Analysis of non-aggregated data (not shown on Table 15) found that, among those with learning difficulties needing any educational supports, the most widely used or needed are tutors or teachers' aids (needed by 65.7% of those with any educational support needs), note takers or readers (by 32.5%) and recording equipment or portable notetakers (by 21.6%).

### **C. Specialized Aids and Devices for Learning**

Table 16 shows the numbers of working-age people (15 – 64 years) with learning difficulties who use or need aids/devices for learning and the percentages with unmet needs. Such aids/devices include portable spell checkers, recording equipment, talking books, pocket organizers, a home computer (including software and peripheral devices such as a printer) and various and sundry other aids/devices. The 82,990 people who use or need such aids or devices comprise 20.8% of working-age people with learning difficulties. More than half of this group (57.2%) need more aids/devices than are available to them. That gap holds fairly constant across age groups but is more pronounced among women than men, where respectively 61.8% and 53.4% have unmet needs. The gap also becomes more pronounced as severity of disability increases. For instance, among people with learning difficulties, 61.2% with a very severe level of disability have unmet needs for aids/devices compared with 53.4% of those with a mild level of disability.

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<b>Table 16. Working-age people with learning or developmental disabilities using or needing aids/devices for learning, by age group, gender and severity of disability</b>		
	<b>Number using or needing aids/devices</b>	<b>Percent with unmet need among those using or needing aids/devices</b>
<b>All working age</b>	82,990	57.2%
<b>Age</b>		
15-44	48,340	56.4%
45-64	34,650	58.4%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	45,390	53.4%
Female	37,600	61.8%
<b>Severity</b>		
Mild	6,280	41.1%
Moderate	15,340	49.2%
Severe	20,790	60.1%
Very Severe	40,580	61.2%

Table 17 shows that, aside from various ‘other’ aids and devices that are not listed in detail, the greatest gaps between aids/devices needed and actually used are for talking books and voice recognition software. Some 46.5% of those using or needing talking books have unmet needs. So do 46.2% of those using or needing voice recognition software. Owing to high sampling variability those figures should be used with caution.

On average, people with learning difficulties need 1.5 more aids or devices than are available to them. Of some interest, those with learning difficulties whose needs are fully met use approximately 4 aids or devices on average.

<b>Table 17. Percentages of working-age people with learning difficulties and needs for specialized aids/devices for learning</b>		
	<b>% requiring +</b>	<b>% of those requiring with any unmet needs</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.8%</b>	<b>57.2%</b>
Portable spell checker	2.7%	39.3% *
Recording equipment	3.4%	38.3% *
Talking books	3.0% *	46.5% *
Pocket organizers	3.7%	23.0% *
Home computer	12.5%	38.2%
Scanner or printer	6.3%	13.6% *
Spell/grammar checking software	7.6%	17.8% *
Voice recognition software	3.0%	46.2% *
Software organizational tools	2.9%	11.7%
Other	8.8%	59.3%
* High sampling variability. Use figures with caution.		
+ Figures in this column do not add to 20.8% as some people require more than one type of aid or device.		

The two leading reasons why people with learning difficulties lack the aids or devices they need for learning are that they are too expensive (62.6%) and that they are not covered by insurance (44.6%), which again implies costliness (Table 18). Lack of knowledge about where or how to obtain the needed aids or devices is another major factor that affects 23.4%.

<b>Table 18. Reasons why people with learning disabilities or developmental disabilities do not have needed aids/devices for learning</b>	
Not covered by insurance	44.6%
Too expensive	62.6%
Condition not serious enough	10.1%
Don't know where/how to obtain	23.4%
Not available	12.9%
Other reason	14.4%

#### **D. Difficulties in Education**

People with learning difficulties are more likely than people with disabilities more broadly to have experienced the difficulties in education shown on Table 19. In particular they are more likely to have: attended special education school or classes, taken fewer courses/subjects, left their community to attend school, and taken longer than their age peers to achieve their present level of



education. People with developmental disabilities are even more likely to have experienced those difficulties.

	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>	<b>– LD</b>	<b>– DD</b>
Started school later than most age peers	9.6%	17.6%	17.5%	23.8%
School interrupted for long periods of time	26.0%	31.1%	30.5%	29.3%
Attended special education school or class	18.9%	47.1%	47.6%	62.5%
Took fewer courses or subjects	24.6%	45.5%	45.6%	54.6%
Took courses by correspondence/ home study	12.6%	15.6%	15.9%	10.6%*
Left community to attend school	10.0%	16.8%	16.4%	21.8%
Took longer to achieve present education level	28.1%	50.5%	49.8%	53.4%

\* High sampling variability. Use figure with caution.

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## VI. Employment and Income

### A. Labour Force Status and Full-time/Part-time Employment

The labour force status of working-age people with and without disabilities is shown on Table 20. The employment rate for people with learning difficulties is less than half that for people without disabilities (31.5% compared with 71%) and well below that for the entire working-age PALS population with disabilities (45.6%). For people with developmental disabilities the rate is lower still (26.6%).

Disability status	Labour force status		
	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the labour Force
Non-disabled	71.0%	5.7%	23.3%
Any disability	45.6%	7.1%	47.2%
Learning difficulties	31.5%	12.4%	56.1%
- DD	26.6%	5.5%	67.9%
- LD	30.9%	10.0%	59.1%

The labour force participation rate is defined as the percentage of people either employed or unemployed (i.e., available for work) in relation to the entire working-age population. The participation rate for people without disabilities when PALS was conducted was 76.7%, 52.8% for people with any disability and 43.9% for people with learning difficulties. For people with LD in particular the participation rate was 40.9% and for those with developmental disabilities, 32.1%. In other words, fewer than half of working-age adults with LD were in the labour force and less than one-third with developmental disabilities.

Unemployment rates tell a slightly different story. The unemployment rate is defined as the number of people not working but available for work (i.e., unemployed) as a percentage of the active labour force (i.e., employed plus unemployed). For the non-disabled working-age population the unemployment rate was 7.4% at the time of the 2001 Census and for the PALS disabled population, nearly twice that rate at 13.5%. For people with learning difficulties the unemployment rate was nearly double again at 28.2%. For people with LD in particular the unemployment rate was 24.4% and for people with DD, 17.1%. If people with LD were more likely than those with DD to be participating in the active labour force when PALS was conducted, they were also comparatively more likely to be looking for work.

The latter findings are not altogether consistent with other research. For example, Blackorby and Wagner (1996) found that the employment rate for youth with learning disabilities and out of school 3 - 5 years was 71%, with 57% working

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full time. These rates were higher than for other disability groups. Brown and Johnson (2003) and Stilington et. al (1992) have found employment rates of around 70%, and unemployment rates around 12% for young adults with LD.

However, Haring et al. (1990) found that young adults with LD who had attended self-contained classes in high school had an unemployment rate of 32%, a rate three times the national average. Of those employed, few were in full-time employment and most were being paid lower wages.

In the US context, Olney & Kennedy (2001) have found that, compared with others with disabilities, people with developmental disabilities have much lower rates of competitive employment and are much more likely to be employed in segregated work settings.

Table 21 shows that, compared with the non-disabled working-age population and working-age people with any disability, the levels of employment for people with learning difficulties tend to be considerably lower, even in middle adulthood, which are the prime earning years.

<b>Table 21. Labour force status, by disability status and age group</b>			
	<b>Labour force status</b>		
	<b>Employed</b>	<b>Unemployed</b>	<b>Not in the labour force</b>
<b>Non-disabled</b>			
15-34	67.5%	7.7%	24.9%
35-44	81.4%	5.2%	13.4%
45-54	78.7%	4.4%	16.9%
55-64	50.6%	3.3%	46.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>71.0%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>
<b>Any disability</b>			
15-34	48.1%	14.4%	37.5%
35-44	54.5%	8.5%	37.0%
45-54	53.0%	6.2%	40.8%
55-64	31.1%	2.9%	66.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45.6%</b>	<b>7.1%</b>	<b>47.2%</b>
<b>Learning difficulties</b>			
15-34	32.7%	15.4%	51.9%
35-44	32.1%	9.9%	58.0%
45-54	32.2%	19.3%	48.5%
55-64	27.3%	—	72.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31.5%</b>	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>56.1%</b>

Among adults 15 years and older who worked at some point in the year before the 2001 Census was conducted, 78.1% of employed people without disabilities worked full time, compared with 70.4% of employed people with any disability and 64.3% of those employed with learning difficulties (Table 22). The latter finding is consistent with the comparatively high need of people with learning difficulties for modified work hours or job duties, which is discussed below in relation to Table 26.

<b>Table 22. Full-time/part-time employment status by disability status for people who worked at some point in the reference year</b>		
<b>Disability status</b>	<b>Full-time</b>	<b>Part-time</b>
No disability	78.1%	21.9%
Any disability	70.4%	29.6%
Learning difficulties	64.3%	35.7%

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## B. Skill Levels in Employment

As shown on Table 23, employed people with learning difficulties are about twice as likely as people without disabilities to have 'unskilled' jobs (28.2% compared with 13.2%) and about half as likely to have jobs that require application of 'professional' skills (8% and 15.7% respectively). While the research did not find major variations by disability status across semi-skilled and skilled jobs broadly conceived, people with disabilities are less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to have jobs in management (7.3% compared with 10%), particularly if they have learning difficulties (6.2%).

Skill level	Disability status		
	No disability	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Management	10.0%	7.3%	6.2%*
Professional	15.7%	14.2%	8.0%*
Skilled	29.4%	28.9%	24.9%
Semi-skilled	31.8%	33.2%	32.9%
Unskilled	13.2%	16.4%	28.0%

\* High sampling variability. Use figures with caution.

## C. Kinds of Employment Held

People with learning difficulties are less likely than non-disabled employed people (Table 24) to have jobs in the broadly classed occupations of:

- management;
- business, finance and administration;
- natural and applied sciences;
- health, social sciences, education, government services and religion.

People with learning difficulties are more likely to have sales and services jobs (33.7%), trades, transport, equipment operating and related jobs (15.9%), jobs in primary industry (5.9%) and in processing, manufacturing and utilities (8.3%).

**Table 24. Occupations by disability status (people employed at some point in the reference year)**

Occupation	Disability Status		
	No disability	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Management	10.0%	7.3%	6.2%*
Business, finance and administrative	17.6%	16.9%	13.5%
Natural and applied sciences	6.4%	4.3%	2.4%*
Health	5.2%	5.1%	3.9%*
Social science, education, government service and religion	7.9%	8.3%	5.3%*
Art, culture, recreation and sport	3.0%	3.5%	—**
Sales and service	24.0%	25.2%	33.7%
Trades, transport, equipment operators and related	14.1%	16.1%	15.9%*
Primary industry	4.8%	5.7%	5.9%*
Processing, manufacturing and utilities	7.1%	7.8%	8.3%*
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* High sampling variability. Use figures with caution.  
 \*\* Unreliable estimate. Data suppressed.

#### D. Class of Worker

Like the vast majority (87.8%) of employed people without disabilities, employed people with a disability are likely to be working for wages, salary, tips or commission (83.9%) particularly if they have a learning or developmental disability (88.8% – Table 25). However, people with disabilities are more likely than people without disabilities to be involved in self-employment (15.5% compared with 11.8%). While the sampling variability is high and the figures should be used with caution, it would also appear that people with learning difficulties are more likely to be self-employed (10.8%).

**Table 25. Class of worker by disability status (people employed at some point in the reference year)**

Class of worker	Disability status		
	No disability	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Working w/o pay in family business or farm	0.4%	0.7%	—**
Self-employed	11.8%	15.5%	10.8%*
Working for wages, salary, tips or commission	87.8%	83.9%	88.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\*High sampling variability. Use figures with caution.  
 \*\*Unreliable estimate. Data suppressed.

## E. Supports for Employment

The right hand column of Table 26 shows that, compared with the working-age population with any disability who need one or more supports in order to work (52.5%), those with learning difficulties are more likely to need such supports (61.2%). People with learning difficulties are more likely to need job redesign (modified or different duties) or modified work hours (including modified work days and reduced work hours – 48.4% compared with 40.2%). They are more than twice as likely to need human support, such as a reader, sign language interpreter, job coach or personal assistant (16.6% compared with 7.3%).

	<b>% of employed requiring</b>	<b>% of unemployed requiring</b>	<b>% of not in the labour force requiring</b>	<b>% of total requiring</b>
<b>Any disability</b>				
<b>Requiring any job support</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>41.8%</b>	<b>71.1%</b>	<b>52.5%</b>
<b>Job supports:</b>				
- Job redesign and/or modified work hours	25.3%	34.5%	55.4%	40.2%
Human supports	2.7%	6.9%	11.9%	7.3%
- Aids/devices or other equipment	2.1%	3.9%	8.2%	5.1%
- Other non-architectural/non-transportation	4.5%	4.4%	7.9%	6.1%
<b>Learning difficulties</b>				
<b>Requiring any job support</b>	<b>47.6%</b>	<b>29.8%</b>	<b>75.8%</b>	<b>61.2%</b>
<b>Job supports:</b>				
- Job redesign and/or modified work hours	36.0%	26.2%	60.3%	48.4%
- Human supports	7.9%	7.8%	23.5%	16.6%
- Aids/devices or other equipment	4.9%	2.9%	11.8%	8.5%
- Other non-architectural/non-transportation	5.8%	3.1%	10.9%	8.3%

Regardless of labour force state the most widely needed forms of employment supports are job redesign or modified work hours (Table 26, above), particularly so among those with learning difficulties who are out of the labour force, i.e., for 60.3% compared with 55.4% of people with any disability who are out of the labour force. The need for human supports is also high among people with learning difficulties who are out of the labour force (23.5% compared with 11.9%).

Table 27 shows the percentages of employed people who need any job supports, and, among those, the percentages with unmet needs. As having such

needs addressed is likely a necessary condition of employment for many, it is not surprising that the table shows relatively low levels of unmet needs among those who do have jobs and who need various supports. Overall, only 21.7% of employed people with learning difficulties who require job support have needs that are unmet, which is also the case for only 23.3% of employed people with any disability and job support requirements.

**Table 27. Total and unmet job supports needed by employed people, by disability status**

Selected job supports	Percent of total employed people receiving or needing any job supports		Percent of those receiving or needing job supports whose need for the supports are unmet	
	Any disability	Learning difficulties	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Job redesign and or modified work hours	25.3%	36.0%	18.8%	17.5%
Human supports	2.7%	7.9%	15.4%	10.7%
Aids/devices or other equipment	2.1%	4.9%	30.1%	23.7%
Other non-architectural/ non-transportation	4.5%	5.8%	26.4%	11.8%
<b>Requiring any job support</b>	<b>35.0%</b>	<b>47.6%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>21.7%</b>

Only a small percentage of employed people with learning difficulties need aids/ devices or other equipment in the workplace (4.9% – Table 27), as do only a small percentage of employed people with any disability (2.1%). However, the extent of unmet need experienced by those people is considerable (i.e., for 23.7% and 30.1%, respectively). Aids/devices and other equipment are defined as technical aids (e.g., voice synthesizer, TTY, TDD, infrared system, portable notetakers), computers with Braille, large print or speech access, scanners, or communication aids (e.g., Braille or large print reading material or recording equipment).

Table 28 shows the employment rates for people by disability status and by whether they need various employment supports. Only 24.5% of people with learning difficulties who need any supports for employment have jobs compared with the 31.5% employment rate for this group more generally. Similarly, only 30.4% of those with any disability and who need one or more employment supports are employed compared with the 45.6% employment rate for those with disabilities more broadly.

People with learning difficulties who need human supports in the workplace are unlikely to be employed (15%), which is also the case for people with any disability and such needs (16.6%). Those with learning difficulties who require aids/devices or other equipment are also unlikely to be employed (18.1%), which is also the case for people with any disability facing such needs (18.7%).



<b>Table 28. Employment rate by any need for job supports and disability status</b>	
	<b>% Employed</b>
<b>Any disability</b>	
<b>All working age</b>	45.6%
<b>Requiring any job support</b>	30.4%
<b>Selected job supports:</b>	
- Job redesign and or modified work hours	28.8%
- Human supports	16.6%
- Aids/devices or other equipment	18.7%
- Other non-architectural/ non-transportation	33.8%
<b>Learning difficulties</b>	
<b>All working age</b>	31.5%
<b>Requiring any job support</b>	24.5%
<b>Selected job supports:</b>	
- Job redesign and or modified work hours	23.4%
- Human supports	15.0%
- Aids/devices or other equipment	18.1%
- Other non-architectural/ non-transportation	21.8%

## **F. Perceptions of Discrimination in Employment**

About one in five people with learning difficulties believed that they had been refused employment because of their condition in five years prior to PALS. Moreover, people with learning difficulties are about twice as likely as others with disabilities to report experiencing various other forms of discrimination in employment because of their condition (Table 29).

<b>Table 29. Perceived discrimination in employment in the past five years</b>				
	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>	<b>- DD</b>	<b>- LD</b>
Have been refused employment	11.3%	19.9%	18.1%	19.8%
Have been refused a promotion	4.7%	7.9%	4.7%	8.1%*
Have been refused training	3.0%	6.2%	4.7%	6.4%*
Have been terminated bcs of disability	8.8%	14.8%	12.5%	14.7%

\* High sampling variability. Use figures with caution

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## G. Income

Given the low employment rate for people with disabilities – people with learning difficulties in particular – it is not surprising that their average personal incomes are considerably lower than those for non-disabled adults (Table 30). The average personal income of people with learning difficulties is 51.2% that of people without disabilities and 69.1% that of people with any type of disability. The median personal income of people with learning difficulties is 48.5% that of people without disabilities and 68.8% that of people with any type of disability.

	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>
Non-disabled	29,092	21,912
Any disability	21,545	15,451
Learning difficulties	14,882	10,637

The average family income (Table 31) of people with learning difficulties is 64.5% that of people without disabilities and 89.9% that of people with any type of disability. The median family income of people with learning difficulties is 55.6% that of people without disabilities and 87.3% that of people with any type of disability.

	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>
Non-disabled	68,181	57,104
Any disability	48,920	36,337
Learning difficulties	43,973	31,734

Table 32 shows the percentages of people without and with various disabilities by low-income status. The low-income cut-offs are defined as the income levels below which families are likely to spend 20% more than the average family on food, shelter and clothing (Statistics Canada, 2006a).

Some 14.2% of non-disabled adults had low incomes in 2001. The rate was about two-thirds higher for all adults with disabilities (23.3%). For people with learning difficulties the rate was almost 2.5 times higher (34.2%) and represents more than a third of all of those with learning difficulties. Focusing on people with developmental disabilities, the rate moved even higher to 36.9% (in contrast to 34.0% among people with LD).

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	<b>Low income household?</b>	
	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Non-disabled	85.8%	14.2%
Any disability	76.8%	23.2%
Learning difficulties	65.8%	34.2%
- DD	63.1%	36.9%
- LD	66.0%	34.0%

## **H. Non-Employment Sources of Income**

Given the comparatively low incomes and lesser attachment to employment of people with learning difficulties, it is not surprising that they were more likely than people with disabilities more broadly to be receiving provincial social assistance in 2001 (26.7% compared with 10.7% – Table 33). That pattern has been observed in other research (Crawford, 2002; Crawford, 2005b). Of some interest, people with learning difficulties were 1.7 times more likely to be receiving the Disability Benefit from the Canada/Quebec Pension Plan (18.6% compared with 10.8%). The Disability Benefit is only available to people who contribute to the CPP or QPP through a levy on employment earnings.

<b>Income sources</b>	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>
Employment Insurance	4.5%	4.4%
Workers Compensation	5.5%	4.9%
CPP/QPP Disability Benefit	10.8%	18.6%
Private insurance	6.7%	8.3%
Social assistance	10.7%	26.7%
Veterans' or other non-emp. sources	6.9%	8.9%

## VII. Disability-Specific Support, General Health and Sense of Personal Control

### A. Help with Everyday Activities

Table 34 shows that people with learning difficulties are more likely to need one or more forms of help with everyday activities than people with disabilities more generally (77.8% versus 63.4%). They are also more likely to have needs for help that are only partially met or that are fully unmet (42.4% compared with 35.8%).

While people with learning difficulties' overall extent of need for help is not major in the areas child care and for nursing care or medical treatment at home, the extent of unmet need for those who do require assistance in these areas approaches 50%.

	Percent of total receiving or needing any help		Percent of those receiving or needing a given kind of help who have any unmet need for that help	
	Any disability	Learning difficulties	Any disability	Learning difficulties
<b>Extent of any need for help and any unmet need</b>	63.4%	77.8%	35.8%	42.4%
<b>Everyday activities:</b>				
Meal preparation	24.7%	40.8%	16.7%	21.5%
Everyday housework	36.9%	42.8%	27.0%	35.7%
Heavy household chores	55.9%	53.8%	25.3%	34.9%
Getting to appointments/errands	37.0%	51.8%	20.0%	27.2%
Personal finances	19.1%	36.5%	12.4%	16.6%
Child care	1.8%	3.2%	40.5%	48.9%
Personal care	13.4%	23.0%	21.7%	22.4%
Nursing care/ medical treatment at home	6.1%	5.8%	28.8%	46.9%
Moving about at home	4.8%	8.0%	21.9%	35.4%

The reasons for unmet needs for help look similar for people with learning difficulties and for those with any disability (Table 35). That the help is too expensive is the leading reason for both groups (49.2% and 48.4% respectively).

Lack of insurance coverage is also a key factor, which also implies costliness, i.e., for 24.5% of people with learning difficulties and 24.8% of people with any disability.

However, people with learning difficulties are considerably more likely to report non-availability of informal help from family or friends (33.5% compared with 25.4%). In part this may be a function of the relatively high percentage who do not live with family members (Table 11); family members provide most of the assistance with everyday tasks to people with disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2003). As well, people with learning difficulties are nearly twice as likely to indicate that their application for help has been turned down by the home care system (12.1% compared with 6.8%).

**Table 35. Reasons why needs for help are unmet, by disability status**

Reasons for unmet needs	Disability status	
	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Home care turned down	6.8%	12.1%
On a waiting List	4.3%	5.9%
Not covered by insurance	24.8%	24.5%*
Too expensive	48.4%	49.2%
Do not know where to obtain	22.6%	26.2%
Help not available in area	9.7%	13.2%
Informal help from family or friends not available	25.4%	33.5%*
Other reasons	17.1%	18.1%

\* High sampling variability. Use figures with caution

## B. General Health

People with learning difficulties have poorer general health than people without disabilities and somewhat poorer health than people with disabilities more broadly (Table 36). In stark contrast to only 4.6% of non-disabled adults, more than half (52.1%) of people with learning difficulties reported only fair or poor health in PALS. The data for non-disabled persons are from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) of 2003.

**Table 36. Self-reported general health by disability status**

Health status	Non-disabled (CCHS 2003)	Any disability	Learning difficulties
Excellent	28.3%	6.1%	7.8%
Very good	39.8%	18.7%	14.0%
Good	27.4%	33.4%	26.1%
Fair	4.2%	28.0%	32.4%
Poor	0.4%	13.9%	19.7%

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Total	100%	100%	100%
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### C. Medications

Table 37 shows the numbers and percentages of people with disabilities who either use medications on a regular basis, i.e., at least once a week in the reference year, or, due to cost, are unable to get needed medications or take them less often. A high proportion of people with learning difficulties require medications in that sense (76.8%), which is also the case for people with disabilities more generally (82.8%).

A comparatively high percentage of those with learning difficulties who require or regularly use medications have needs in this area that are unmet (25.8% versus 17.2%). A need for medications is defined as unmet if, due to cost, a respondent was unable to get the medications at all, or took the medications less often than they were supposed to in the reference year.

The number of people with learning difficulties with needs that are completely unmet is too low to report (i.e., they did not take any medications but needed to and could not due to cost). Most of the unmet needs for medications among people with learning difficulties have been met at least partially.

**Table 37. Medication requirements and unmet needs by disability status (those who use or need medications regularly, i.e., at least once a week)**

<b>Disability status</b>	<b>Number requiring or using any medications regularly</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>Number with any unmet needs for regularly needed medications</b>	<b>% regularly requiring medications with unmet needs</b>
Learning difficulties	364,870	76.8%	93,980	25.8%
Any disability	2,833,490	82.8%	486,930	17.2%

### D. Sense of Personal Control in Decision-Making

People with learning difficulties are less likely than others with disabilities to say they make all the decisions about their everyday activities (Table 38). Only 47.3% of people with developmental disabilities make all or most of these decisions compared with 88.8% of people with disabilities as a whole.

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	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>	<b>– DD</b>	<b>– LD</b>
Make all the decisions	68.9%	46.2%	27.3%	46.7%
Make the majority of decisions	19.9%	25.4%	20.0%	25.2%
Make some decisions	9.0%	19.8%	35.6%	19.4%
Make none of the decisions	2.2%	8.6%	17.1%	8.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

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## VIII. Participation in Community Leisure Activities

### A. Barriers to Participation in Community Leisure Activities

People with learning difficulties are nearly twice as likely as people with disabilities as a whole to experience barriers to participating in community leisure activities (43% versus 25.4% – Table 39). Next to cost (24.1%), unmet need for someone’s assistance (13.9%) is a key factor that prevents people with learning difficulties from taking part in such activities.

	<b>Any disability</b>	<b>Learning difficulties</b>
At least one of the following barriers:	25.4%	43.0%
- Unmet need for specialized aids/equipment	2.7%	4.3%
- Unmet need for someone’s assistance	7.0%	13.9%
- Transportation inadequate or not accessible	5.9%	11.7%
- Community has no facilities or programs	3.8%	6.9%
- Facilities, equipment or programs not accessible	2.9%	5.2%
- Too expensive	15.4%	24.1%
- Design/layout of buildings makes it difficult	6.4%	10.0%



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## **IX. Summary and Conclusion**

This report has provided a demographic ‘snapshot’ of people with learning difficulties. The research drew from Statistics Canada’s 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) and from scholarly and other literature.

Several key findings stand out for attention. People with learning difficulties as captured in PALS are likely to have severe and multiple disabilities. They tend to have low educational attainment and to have faced a range of difficulties at school.

There is strong evidence that this population is much more likely to experience barriers to and discrimination in employment. A majority are not in the labour force. Among those in the labour force, unemployment rates are well above those of others – both those with and without disabilities. A great many cannot find the accommodations that they need in order to work and many believe they have faced discrimination in decisions regarding hiring, firing, job training and job advancement.

It is thus not surprising that over a third are living in low-income families and one in four is dependent upon social assistance.

Going along with the high incidence of low income, they are more likely to rent their accommodations and their housing is more likely to be in need of major repair.

Moreover, they are more likely to face barriers in participating in community leisure activities, in getting the supports they need for schooling or training and are more likely to go without needed supports in undertaking the activities of daily life.

They are much more likely than other adults with disabilities to be living with their parent(s). They are also more likely to be living alone or with non-related others.

A majority are in fair or poor health – more than 11 times the level of people without disabilities, and well above the levels of others with disabilities. They very often do not have much ‘say’ in the decisions about their everyday activities.

The research points to the need for a range of supports in education, employment, housing and in the community more generally to enable people with learning difficulties to participate as equals and realize their potential.

In listening to the aspirations of young adults with intellectual disabilities, Cooney (2002) found some recurring themes. These people said they wanted to

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get a job, to spend time with friends and family, to have "adult" status, i.e., a space or place of their own and self-determination.

Reflecting on his own struggles with a learning disability discovered only in his adult years, Henry Winkler's observations and what he managed to do with his life are instructive:

Because of my character [Fonzie] on Happy Days I was asked to narrate a film for students with learning disabilities in 1976. It was called "Everybody has a Song". Of course I wanted to help these poor kids with this problem! So as I'm reading the narration into a tape recorder, it started to dawn on me. I'm not lazy. I'm not stupid. I'M DYSLEXIC!!! Who knew? Nobody knew when I was growing up (Winkler, 2006).

Winkler earned his bachelor's degree from Emerson College in Boston, Massachusetts, with a dual major in drama and child psychology. He studied abroad and then returned to the United States to earn his master's degree at Yale University in drama.

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## **X. References**

### **Acronyms used in the body of this report**

**LDAC – Learning Disabilities Association of Canada**

**AAMR – American Association on Mental Retardation**

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