

National Survey of People with Disabilities and COVID-19: Technology Access and Use

The spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has led to a worldwide pandemic. Understanding how people with disabilities have been affected by COVID-19 is important as we navigate this unprecedented time. In July 2020, roughly four months after states began providing guidance in response to spread of the virus, 990 adults with disabilities from age 18 to 85 across the United States reported on topics related to how COVID-19 was affecting their lives. This resource addresses survey participant responses to questions about technology access and use.

Technology Access

Overall, 30.2% of respondents had access to the technology needed to stay connected.

Pattern of Technology Use

Overall, 38% of respondents were using technology more than they were before COVID-19. About 17% of respondents were using technology less than before COVID-19.

Technology Types

80% of respondents reported use of a smartphone, and 79.9% use of a computer. 61% indicated use of both a smartphone and a computer. Other ways that people connect include tablets, smart TVs, and gaming consoles.

What Does it Mean?

Technology has been increasingly important for people with and without disability during COVID-19. While there has been a clear response in access to services such as healthcare (which is often met through telehealth), these results suggest there remains an unmet need for technology. This survey did not ask about specific assistive technology use and needs. For some people with disabilities, devices such as alternative keyboards/inputs, screen readers, or speech to text are needed for full access to technology used for sharing information online. Others would significantly benefit in their ability to effectively use technology through training on the built-in features increasingly available within the operating systems of devices. For people with disabilities, who already experience disparities in education, health and employment outcomes, technology access needs must be addressed. The effective application of technology for people with disability would have implications in independent environmental access, social interaction, entertainment, access to food and groceries, safety and security, employment, emergency services, and all aspects of community life that are being conducted online.