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Monika Mitra and Lauren Smith on Conducting a Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities


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Conducting a Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities

Hi, we are Monika Mitra and Lauren Smith from the [Disability, Health, and Employment Policy](#) unit in the [Center for Health Policy and Research](#) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Our research is focused on health disparities between people with and without disabilities.

Evaluating a Population of People with Disabilities

In collaboration with the [Health and Disability Program](#) (HDP) at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH), we conducted a health needs assessment of people with disabilities in Massachusetts. The needs assessment helped us better understand the unmet public health needs and priorities of people with disabilities living in MA. We learned a tremendous amount in doing this assessment and wanted to share our many lessons learned with the AEA365 readership!

Lessons Learned:

3-Pronged approach

Think about your population and how you can reach people who might be missed by more traditional methodologies: In order to reach people with disabilities who may not be included in existing health surveys, we used two other approaches to complement data from the [MA Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\)](#). They included: an anonymous online survey on the health needs of MA residents with disabilities and interviews with selected members of the MA disability community.

Leveraging Partnerships

Think about alternative ways to reach your intended population: For the online survey, we decided on a snowball sampling method. This method consists of identifying potential respondents who in turn identify other respondents; it is a particularly useful methodology in populations who are difficult to reach and may generally be excluded from traditional surveys and affect one's generalizability of findings. HDP's Health and Disability Partnership provided a network to spread the survey to people with disabilities, caregivers, advocates, service providers, and friends/family of people with disabilities.

Accessibility is Key

Focus on accessibility: In an effort to increase the accessibility of the survey, Jill Hatcher from [DEAF, Inc.](#) developed a captioned vlog (a type of video blog) to inform the Deaf, DeafBlind, Hard of Hearing, and Late-Deafened community about the survey. In the vlog, she mentioned that anyone could call DEAF, Inc. through videophone if they wanted an English-to-ASL translation of the survey. Individuals could also respond to the survey via telephone.

Rad Resources:

Disability and Health Data System (DHDS)

[DHDS](#) is an online tool developed by the CDC providing access to state-level health data about people with disabilities.

Health Needs Assessment of People with Disabilities Living in MA, 2013

To access the results of the above-mentioned needs assessment, please [contact the Health and Disability Program](#) at MDPH.

A Profile of Health Among Massachusetts Residents, 2011

This [report](#) published by the MDPH contains information on the health of people with disabilities in Massachusetts.