

# Disability Status

Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging  
Gerontology Institute  
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy & Global Studies



Fact Sheet

December, 2019

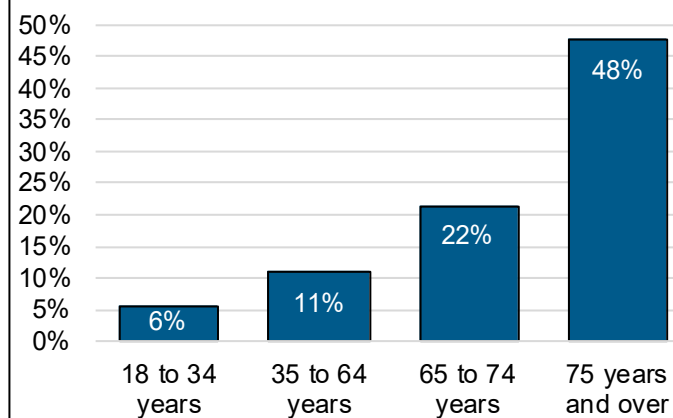
## Highlights

- Risk of disability increases with age. Nearly half of Massachusetts residents age 75 and over have some disability, whereas just about one out of five Massachusetts residents age 65-74 report a disability.
- The share of Massachusetts residents reporting disability is far lower among those younger than 65 in comparison with older adult residents (those over 65).
- Around 15% of older Massachusetts residents report a single disability, while an additional 18% report two or more disabilities.
- Ambulatory difficulty is the most commonly reported type of disability among older adults.
- Among older Massachusetts residents, women experience higher disability rates than men on most types of disability.

## Residents of Massachusetts ages 65 and over

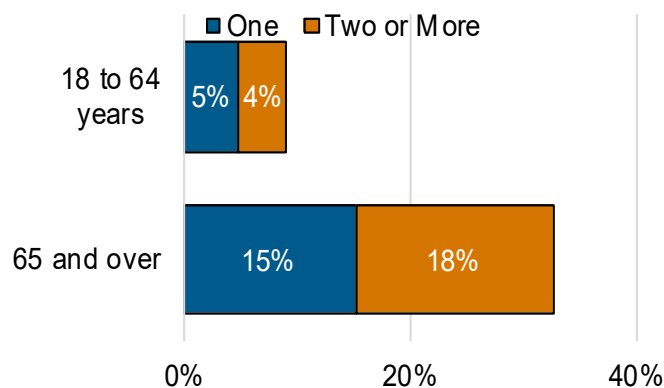
Most adult residents of Massachusetts live free from disability. However, the likelihood of acquiring some form of physical, sensory or cognitive limitation increases noticeably with age. Risk of disability approaches 50% among Massachusetts residents age 75 or older; in contrast, just about one out of five Massachusetts residents age 65-74 report a disability, with far lower shares of adults under age 65 having a disability (see **Figure 1**).

**Figure 1. Percent with Disability by Age, Massachusetts (2017)**



Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017 ---5 Year Estimates, Table B18101

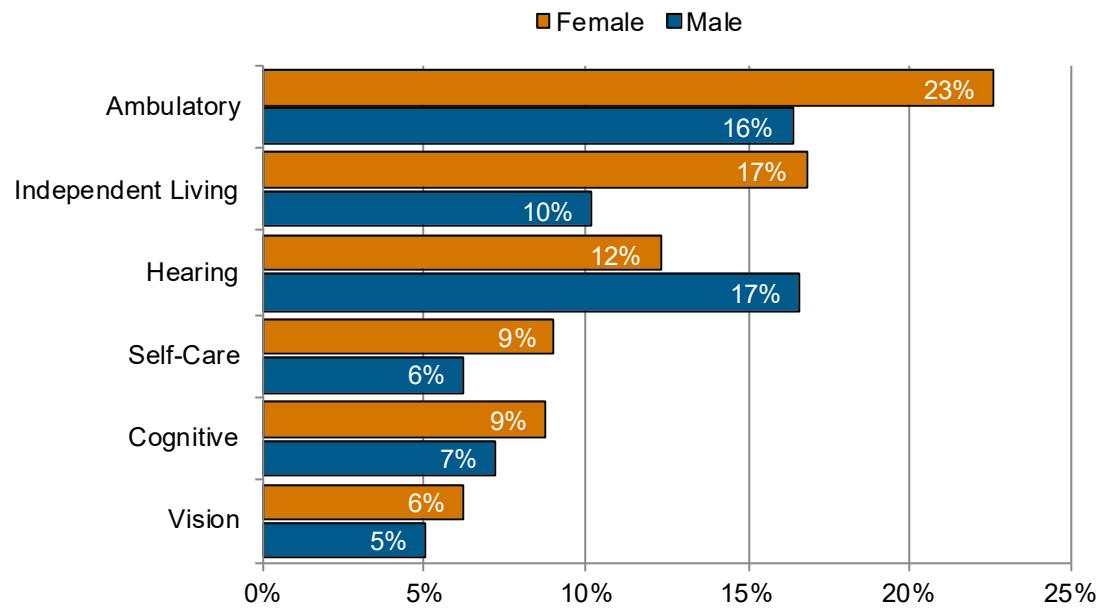
**Figure 2. Percent with Single and Multiple Disabilities by Age, Massachusetts (2017)**



Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017 ---5 Year Estimates, Table C18108

The presence of multiple disabilities is also a common characteristic of older adults. In Massachusetts, 15% of people aged 65 and over report a single disability, and another 18% report two or more disabilities (see **Figure 2**). The presence of multiple disabilities is a major factor that contributes to the ability to live independently and to care for oneself.

**Figure 3. Percent of Older Adults with Difficulty by Disability Type, Massachusetts (2017)**



Source: American Community Survey 2013-2017 ---5 Year Estimates, Tables B18101-7

Women age 65 and over have a slightly higher risk of disability than their male counterparts, and this is true for most types of disability. One-third of women age 65 and over report one or more disabilities, as do 31% of men age 65 and over. In Massachusetts, ambulatory difficulty is the most commonly reported type of disability among older adults aged 65 and over, with 23% of women and 16% of men reporting difficulties such as walking or climbing stairs (see Figure 3). The differences by gender appear in all types of disability. Women experience the highest rate of difficulty on five of the six types of disability, identified in Figure 3, compared to men.

Note that 17% of older women and 10% of older men report an independent living disability. This finding is important and suggests that in Massachusetts, a large share of older women and men experience difficulties doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping, due to physical, mental, or emotional problems. These individuals would benefit from services provided within communities, such as transportation support or homemaker services, that help adults with disabilities remain living at home.

Prepared by Nidya Velasco Roldán and Jan Mutchler  
**Center for Social and Demographic Research on Aging**

Gerontology Institute

University of Massachusetts Boston

100 Morrissey Blvd.

Boston, MA 012125

[www.umb.edu/demographyofaging](http://www.umb.edu/demographyofaging)

[CSDRA@umb.edu](mailto:CSDRA@umb.edu)