

Individuals with Combined Hearing and Vision Loss: Data from the American Community Survey (2022)

# Source and Population

Source: Conway, Megan & Brown-Ogilvie, Tara (April 11, 2024) *Individuals with Combined Hearing and Vision Loss: Data from the American Community Survey.*Sands Point, NY: IRPD Department, Helen Keller National Center for DeafBlind Youth and Adults. Note: Calculations by UNH Institute on Disability using the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 5-year and 1-year estimates, IPUMS data, University of Minnesota. Estimates are subject to sampling variation.

Population: A person with “combined hearing and vision/dual sensory loss,” for the purposes of these data summaries, refers to people who self-reported “yes” on the American Community Survey to BOTH of the following questions: (1) Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing? (2) Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses? This may include individuals who would be considered DeafBlind under federal guidelines as well as other individuals with both significant hearing and vision loss.

# General

According to data collected from the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 2.47 million Americans, or 0.75% of the population, have combined hearing and vision loss. This number has remained fairly consistent over the past 10 years.

# By State

The prevalence of a dual sensory loss can vary by state. From 2017-2022 the states with the highest reported prevalence of combined hearing and vision loss, where prevalence is greater than 1%, are West Virginia (1.50%), New Mexico (1.27%), Oklahoma (1.17%), Kentucky (1.14%), Arkansas (1.19%), Mississippi (1.13%) and Louisiana (1.02%). The states with the lowest reported prevalence of combined hearing and vision loss, where prevalence is less than 0.6%, are Utah (0.51%), Rhode Island (0.58%), Washington D.C. (0.40%), Maryland (0.49%), Minnesota (0.54%), Connecticut (0.57%) and New Jersey (0.54%).

# Seniors

Seniors over the age of 65 represent approximately 65% of the population with a dual sensory loss. Further, nearly 80% of respondents over the age 55 reported both vision and hearing difficulty. Adults who are 55 and older are the largest population of individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss in the United States. \*

# Race/Ethnicity

Data collected by the ACS on race/ethnicity when correlated with data on combined hearing and vision loss suggests that there may be discrepancies in either the prevalence and/or reporting of combined hearing and vision loss based on race/ethnicity. Approximately 64% of people who reported a dual sensory loss in the United States identified as White, 16% as Hispanic, 11% as Black, 4% as Asian, and 5% as other races/ethnicities.

# Employment: Employment Rates

Working age adults (18 to 65) in the United States who report combined hearing and vision loss are almost half as likely to be employed. Just 38% of working age adults with combined hearing and vision loss are employed compared to 75% of working age adults without combined hearing and vision loss. The percentage who are unemployed (looking for work) is similar for both those with and without combined hearing and vision loss (3.6% and 3.3% respectively). However, 58% of working age adults with a dual sensory loss are not in the labor force, compared to 22% for those without combined hearing and vision loss.

# Employment: Industry

Across 14 groupings of occupational industry in the United States, the rankings for percent in an industry are fairly similar for both people with and without combined hearing and vision loss, with some exceptions. Of the top 5 ranked occupations “Educational Services, Health Care or Social Assistance” is the most frequently reported occupation for both people with and without combined hearing and vision loss (17.4% and 22.86%). While “Professional, Scientific, Mgmt., Admin, & Waste Mgmt. Services” is the second ranked occupation for people who do not report combined hearing and vision loss (12.44%), it is only the third ranked occupation for people who do report a dual sensory loss (11.66%).

“Retail” was the second ranked occupation for people who report combined hearing and vision loss (12.79%) and the third ranked occupation for people who do not report combined hearing and vision loss (10.99%). Additionally, “Manufacturing” had a rate of (11.47%) for those with combined vision and hearing loss versus (9.81%) for those without combined sensory loss. Employment in “Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, or Accommodation and Food Services” was similar between populations (8.50%) for those with combined vision and hearing loss with (8.57%), a (.07%) difference between those without sensory loss.

Lastly, “Military” was the least frequently reported occupation for both groups (0.63%) for people with combined hearing and vision loss and (0.82%) for people without combined hearing and vision loss.

# Poverty

People with combined hearing and vision loss in the United States are almost twice as likely to live in poverty (19.1%) than people without combined hearing and vision loss (10.8%). Of those reporting a dual sensory loss living in poverty, approximately 22% are of transition age (14-24) and 18% are seniors (55+).

# Veterans

Veterans represented approximately 17% of the population reporting combined hearing and vision loss in the United States and 6.9% were veterans with a service-related disability.

# Additional Disability

Essentially half (50.4%) of individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss also reported having a cognitive disability. This is significantly higher than the rate of cognitive disability reported by those people who do not have combined hearing and vision loss (5.3%).

# Education Level

People with combined hearing and vision loss report much lower levels of education than people without combined hearing and vision loss. Data on level of education in the United States suggests significant barriers to both high school and college retention and participation by people with combined hearing and vision loss. People with a dual sensory loss aged 25 and older are half as likely to have a bachelor’s degree (16% vs. 36%) and over twice as likely to have less than a high school diploma (24.7% vs. 10.2%) than are people without combined hearing and vision loss. Fewer people who have combined hearing and vision loss also report having had some college (25%) compared to people who do not have combined hearing and vision loss (28%). Discrepancies in attainment of higher education persist for adults aged 30 and older, with only 23% of adults with a dual sensory loss aged 30 and older reporting attainment of an associate’s degree or higher versus 44% of adults aged 30 and older without a dual sensory loss.

Contact Dr. Megan Conway for information about the data presented in these summaries or for additional data requests.

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*\*Note: Report was updated on 8/6/2024 by adding a statistic on adults aged 55 and older.*