

Living with Disabilities in Knox County

Knoxville and Knox County leaders - citizen, elected, and appointed - are continually working towards a more inclusive, accessible, prosperous community.

To achieve this, we must understand the characteristics and needs of the people who live here. This report describes the prevalence of disabilities in Knox County and identifies issues faced by people with disabilities. We take a look at local population numbers, as well as detailed demographic, economic, and quality of life characteristics of our population who report disabilities.

Who is affected?

More than 41 million people in the United States have a disability, or at least 12.6% of the population. Over 54,000 people in Knox County, or 11.9% of the total population, have at least one disability. Knoxville has an even greater share of people with disabilities at 13.5%. In fact, some parts of the city report more than a 20% disability rate.

There are more people with disabilities in the U.S. than there are lefties!

10%



Left handed individuals

12.6%



People with disabilities

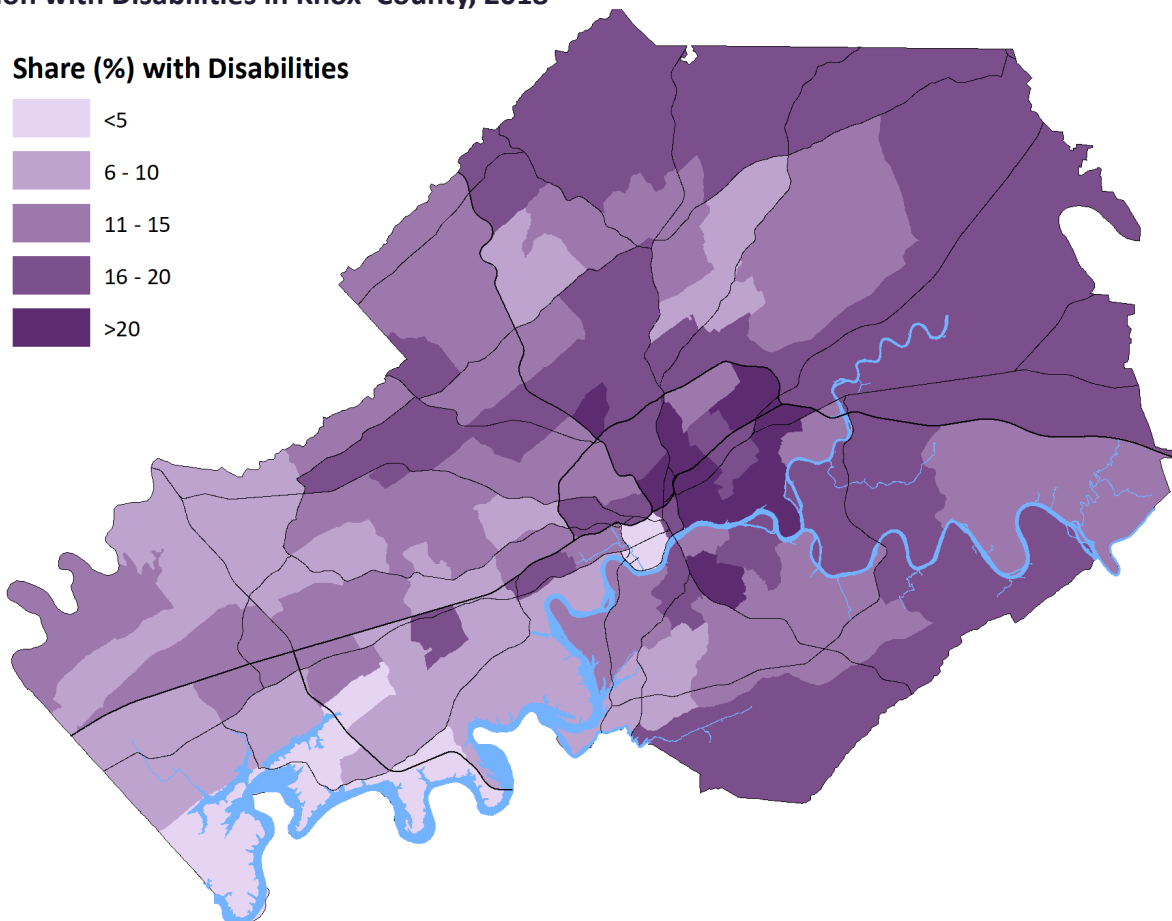
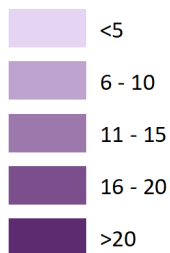
Population with Disabilities, 2018

	Total Population	With a Disability	Share (%) with a Disability
Knox County	461,345	54,741	11.9
Knoxville	185,669	25,043	13.5

**Total population does not include military or people in institutions.*

Population with Disabilities in Knox County, 2018

Share (%) with Disabilities

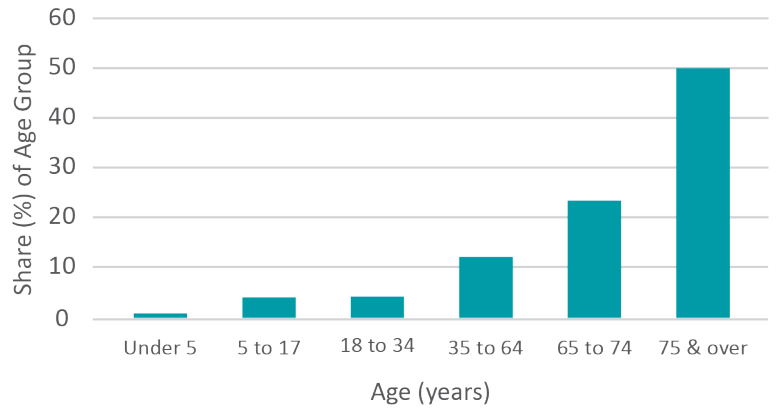


What kinds of disabilities are reported?

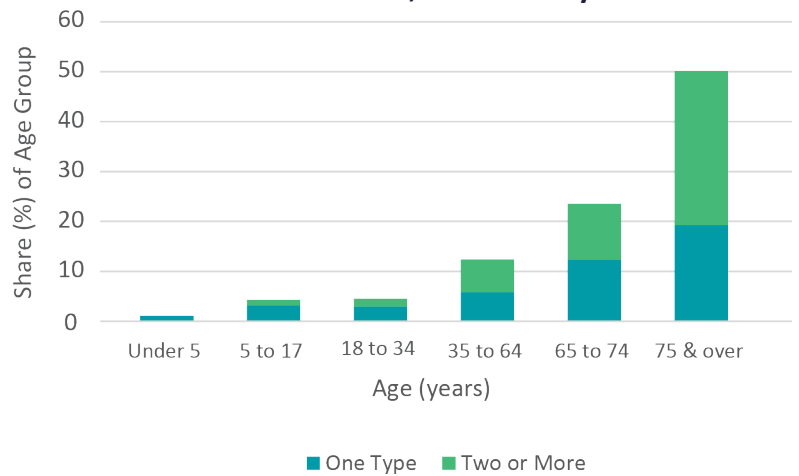
While individuals of any age can have disabilities, prevalence increases significantly as people grow older. In Knox County, only 1.1% of children under the age of 5 are reported as having a disability; by comparison, half of individuals over the age of 75 report having at least one type of disability. The number of people with multiple disabilities also increases with age. In fact, more than 60% of people over the age of 75 with disabilities have more than one type of disability. Because the incidence of disabilities increases with age and **the senior population is increasing in Knox County**, we can reasonably expect that the number of people with disabilities will grow over the next several years.

The population with disabilities has a similar racial composition to the total population of Knox County. African American residents comprise 9.6% of the population with disabilities, 1 percentage point more than in the total population. In contrast, people who are "Other Race," such as Asian Americans, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Pacific Islanders, and people who report two or more races, represent about 2 percentage points less of the population with disabilities than they do for the total population (3.8% and 5.9% respectively).

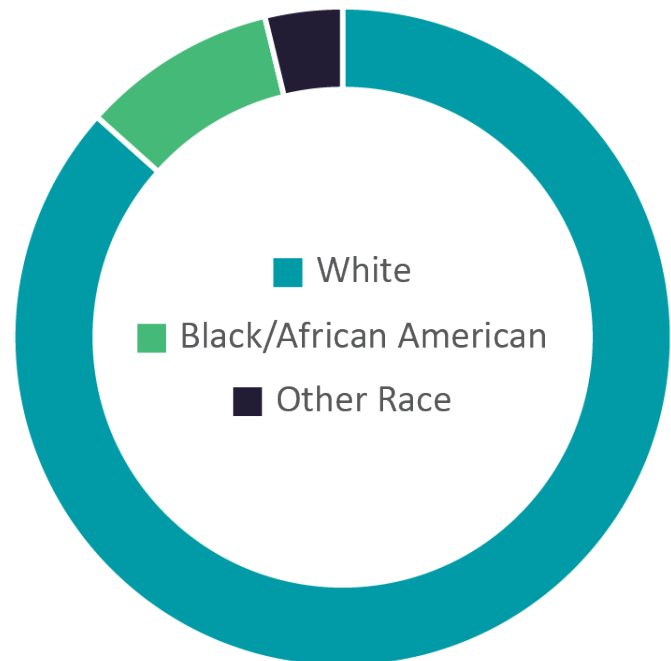
Share (%) of Age Group with Disabilities, Knox County 2018



Number of Disabilities, Knox County 2018



Race of People with Disabilities, Knox County 2018



This report relies on Census Bureau statistics on people with disabilities. The U.S. Census Bureau conducts detailed demographic data collections each year with its American Community Survey (ACS) of households. Among these data are several indicators to describe the population with disabilities, including a breakdown of the number of people with different types of disabilities. Here's how the Census Bureau defines their six categories of disabilities.



Vision

Blindness or serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses or contacts.



Hearing

Deafness or serious difficulty hearing.



Cognitive

Serious difficulty remembering, concentrating, or making decisions.



Ambulatory

Serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.



Self-Care

Serious difficulty dressing or bathing.



Independent Living

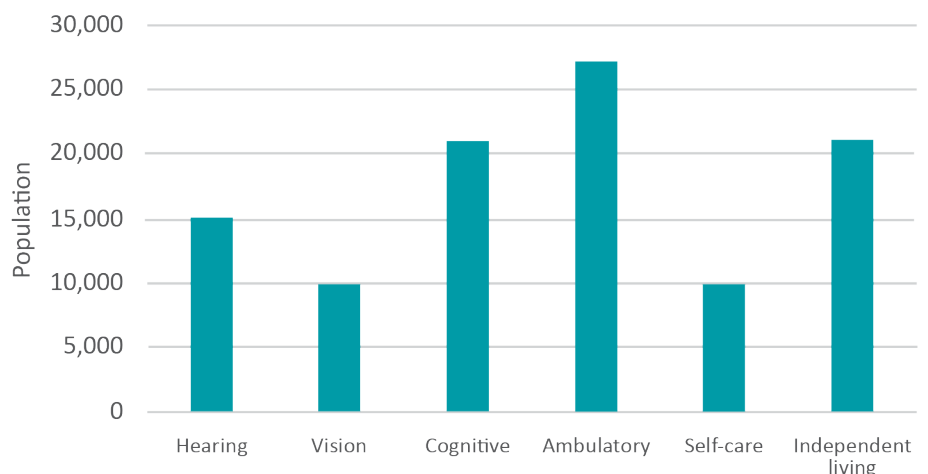
Serious difficulty doing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping.

While the ACS is an excellent source of detailed data on the disability population, it has a couple of known limitations:

- Leaves out several types of disabilities, such as upper limb differences and chronic illness.
- Census data are collected from annual surveys of citizens. Some may choose not to respond to the surveys due to distrust of government or privacy concerns.

Because of these limitations, it can be expected that there are more people in Knox County with disabilities than reported through Census data.

Population by Disability Type, Knox County 2018

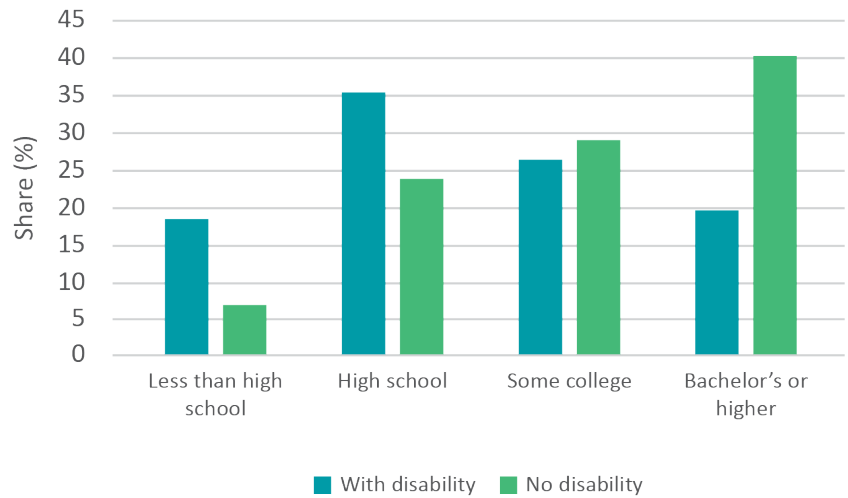


Tennessee Schools for the Deaf operates a Knoxville campus, attracting families with deaf children and also enrolling students from surrounding counties. During the 2018-2019 school year, the Knoxville campus enrolled 130 students ages 1-22.

Educational attainment

Knox County residents with disabilities are half as likely to obtain a higher education than those without disabilities. Barriers to education may include college campuses that are physically inaccessible, communication challenges among instructors, administrators, and other students, and difficulties in providing special instruction accommodations. Only 46.2% of people with disabilities attend college for any length of time compared to 69.3% of people without disabilities and less than 20% obtain a bachelor’s degree or higher – 20 percentage points less than the share of Knox County residents without disabilities. In addition, students with disabilities are almost three times as likely to drop out of high school as their classmates without disabilities.

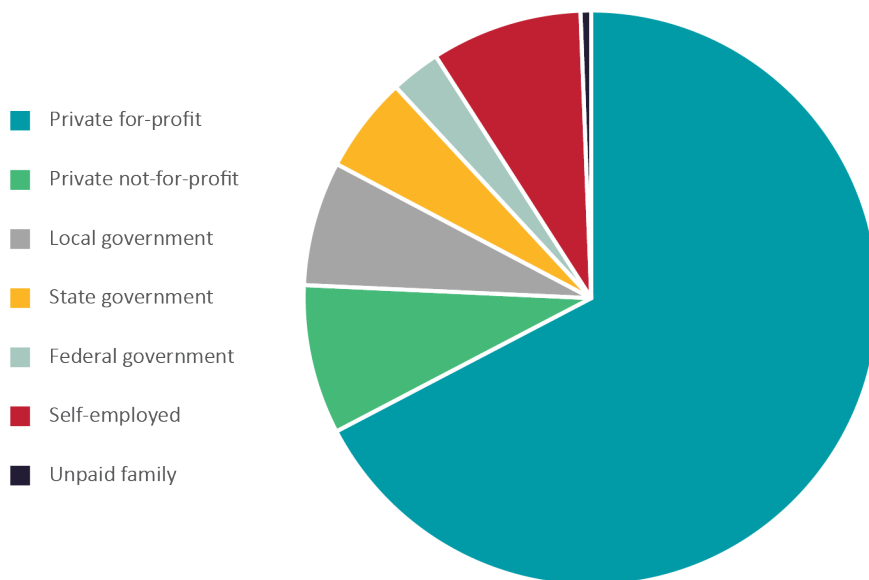
Highest Level of Education Completed, Knox County 2018



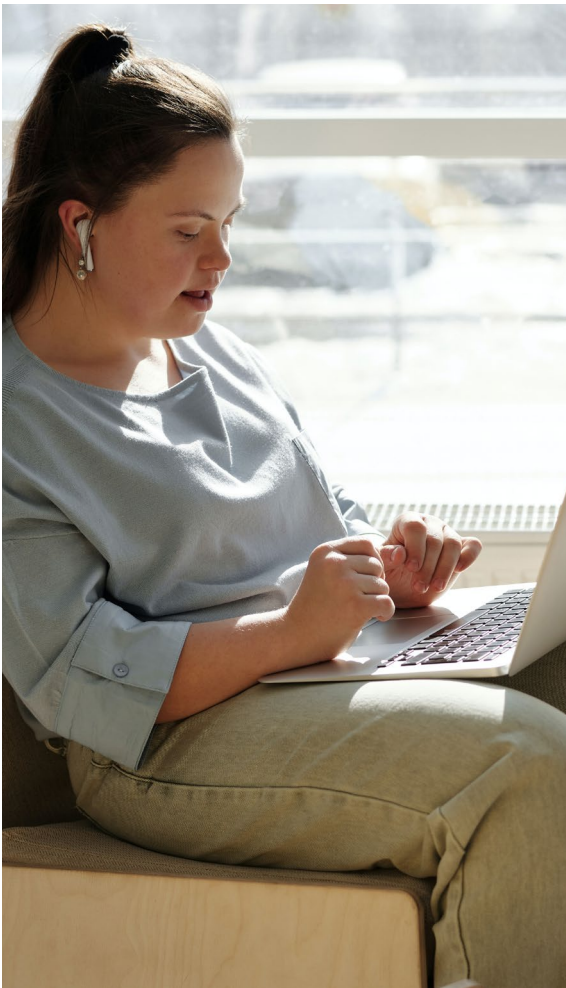
Economic characteristics

In Knox County in 2018, the working age population (persons 16 years of age and older) was 366,646. In that total, 53,613 persons (14.6%) reported disabilities. However, not all persons of working age participate in the labor force – 71.6% of the population without disabilities participate in the labor force compared to 26.5% of the population with disabilities. Among those in the labor force, 226,894 individuals are employed, 12,704 (5.6%) of whom have disabilities. Accordingly, less than a quarter of working age persons with disabilities participate in the labor force and are employed, compared to a 68.4% rate of participation and employment among those without disabilities.

Workers with Disabilities by Employment, 2018



Similar to rates among the general population, people with disabilities are most likely to work in private, for-profit businesses; 67.4% of workers with disabilities and 71.1% of those without disabilities work in this segment. One key difference is that workers with disabilities are more likely to be self-employed than those without disabilities (8.5% compared to 6.3%).



Industry of Employment by Disability Status, Knox County 2018

Industry	Share (%) With Disability	Share (%) Without Disability
Education and health care	21.8	25.4
Retail trade	15.5	13.6
Professional services	14.0	12.9
Leisure and hospitality	10.0	10.3
Manufacturing	7.8	7.6
Construction	5.9	5.6
Financial activities	5.8	6.1
Other services	5.4	4.3
Transportation, warehousing, and utilities	5.3	4.8
Public administration	3.7	3.3
Wholesale trade	2.4	3.1
Information	2.0	2.5
Agriculture and natural resources	0.5	0.5

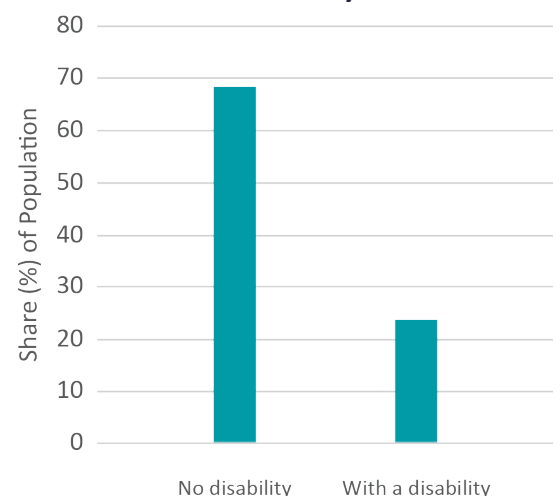
With only a few exceptions, the disability population is represented in the various segments of the local labor force at rates comparable to the general population.

Unemployment rate doesn't tell the whole story

At 2.8%, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities in 2018 in Knox County was lower than that of people without disabilities (3.2%). Despite the low unemployment rate, a total of 76.3% of people age 16 and over with disabilities were non-working, compared to 31.6% of people without disabilities.

Unemployment rates count individuals who are not employed but are actively seeking work. Missing from that count, though, are people who want to work, but are unable because repeated attempts to secure a job failed – as a result, they have involuntarily removed themselves from the work force. Many people with disabilities find themselves in this situation, and are not counted as “unemployed.” It is not possible to keep track of those with disabilities who would like to work but meet too many barriers, either by environment, transportation, hiring practices, or denial of accommodations. Anecdotally, organizations who serve Knoxville residents with disabilities estimate that around 70% of non-working people with disabilities would like to be employed.

People Who are Employed, Knox County 2018



Income and poverty

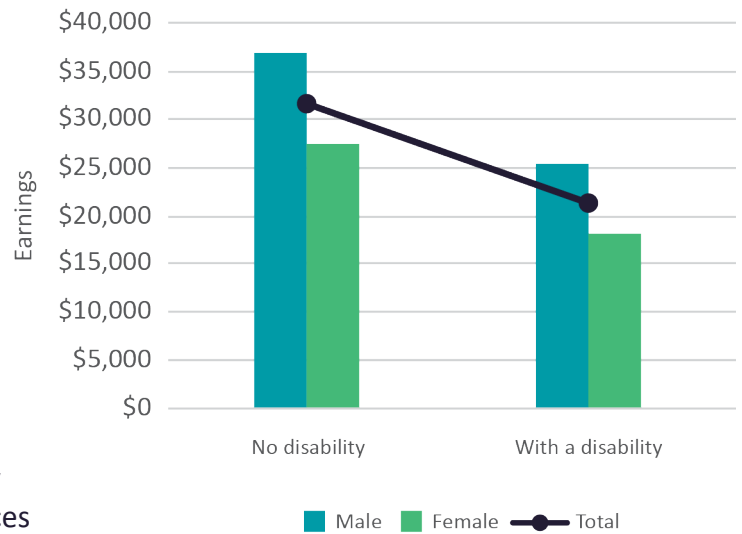
Not only are people with disabilities less likely to be employed, but they are also likely to earn less; people with disabilities earn a median annual income of \$21,400, which is more than \$10,000 less than people without disabilities. As with the rest of the population, males with disabilities earn more than females with disabilities, with a wage gap of \$7,237 for Knox County residents with disabilities compared to \$9,417 for those without.

People with disabilities also are more likely to live in households that are below federal poverty level. Every year, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services publishes guidelines on household income necessary to live, based on how many people are in a household. For example, a family of four needs an annual income of at least \$25,100.

In 2018, there were 67,732 people in Knox County living below poverty, and about 12,000, or 18.2%, had a disability.



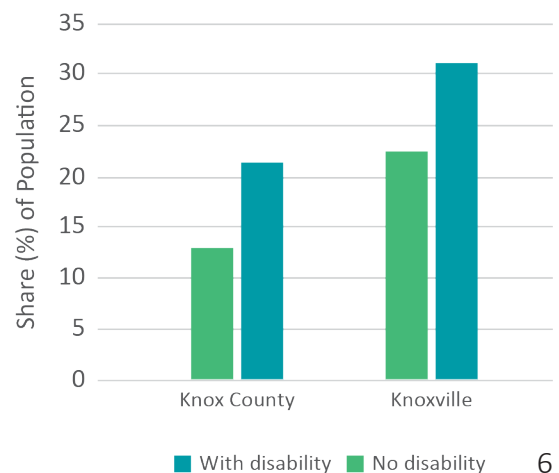
Median Earnings by Disability Status, Knox County 2018



Poverty Guidelines, 2018

Persons in Household	Poverty Guideline
1	\$12,140
2	\$16,460
3	\$20,780
4	\$25,100
5	\$29,420
6	\$33,740
7	\$38,060
8	\$42,380

Below Federal Poverty Level, 2018





Journey to work

While most individuals in the workforce drive to work alone, fewer people with disabilities do so. Alternative modes of transportation are more typically used by people with disabilities, especially carpooling and public transportation. U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics found that, in 2017, workers with disabilities drove personal vehicles for fewer of their trips than workers without disabilities, and they were passengers in personal vehicles for more trips than workers without disabilities. Further, despite the shorter average distance that workers with disabilities travel to work (9.4 miles, compared to 12 miles per trip among the general workforce), their trips take longer (23.3 minutes and 21.0 minutes per trip, respectively).

Among Knox County workers with disabilities...



76.5%
drive alone



11.6%
carpool



2.4%
take public
transportation



5.7%
work at home

- The remaining **4.0%** of Knox County workers fall into the “other” category

Housing

Housing that is both affordable and meets the accessibility needs of the disability population is in short supply — and in some neighborhoods in deficit — in Knox County. With financial help from programs like the Tennessee Disability Housing Assistance Program, many low-income households have been able to adapt existing local homes to meet accessibility needs. The program funds modifications to home structures for people with disabilities who live in low-income households.

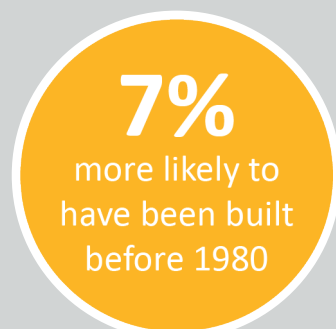
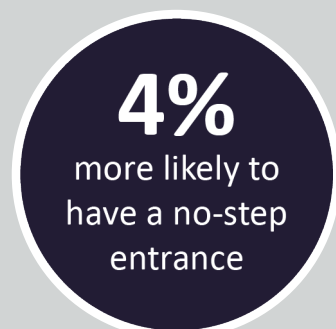
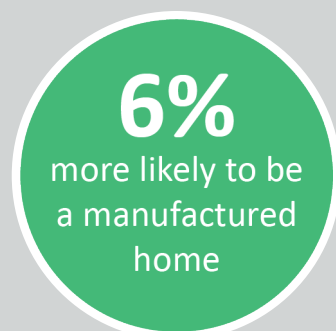
Additional accessibility concerns complicate the availability of rental housing for families with disabilities, especially among those of low-income. Housing built with public funds must be accessible at least on the ground floor, and on all floors in buildings with elevators, however, the actual number of accessible units can be limited by how the buildings are constructed because multi-story buildings are not required to have elevators.

In the 2015 report, “A Picture of Disability and Designated Housing,” the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found that, nationally, 41.2% of households using public housing have at least one person with disabilities, and 43.6% of households that requested disability features had at least one person with disabilities living there. Among those households, only 30.3% received requested disability features. This share was even lower in southern states, where only 11.4% of households needing accommodations received requested disability features. For every 1,000 public housing units across the South, 407 had at least one person with disabilities and only 9 of them received housing units with disability features.

Right now, the sizable Baby Boomer population cohort ranges in age from 56 to 74 years. As the group continues to age, an increase in the number of people with disabilities is inevitable. Providing necessary stock of accessible housing in Knox County will grow to a major challenge.



Nationally, people with disabilities live in housing that is...



People with disabilities who need help finding housing can visit [TNHousingSearch.org](https://www.tnhousingsearch.org) to locate available units that meet budget and accommodation requirements.

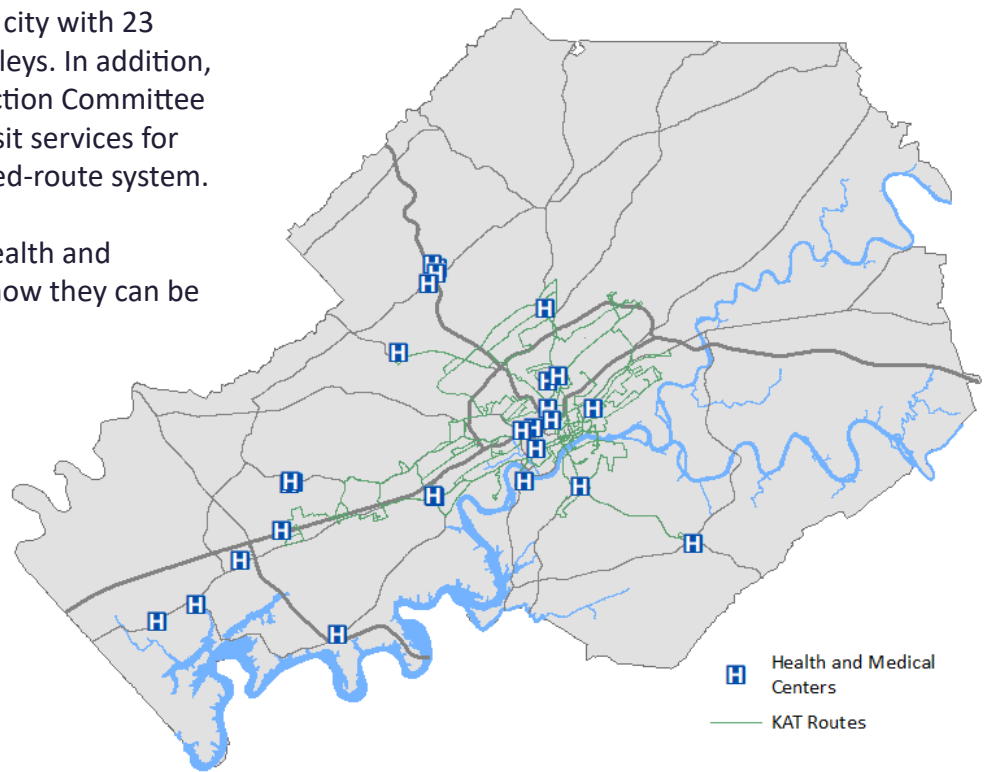
Quality of life

Some factors that affect the independence and quality of life for people with disabilities include availability of safe and convenient modes of transportation, access to healthcare, and opportunities for wellness- and socially-focused programs.

Knoxville Area Transit (KAT) provides accessible public transportation throughout the city with 23 regular bus routes and three free trolleys. In addition, Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC) and KAT both provide paratransit services for people who are unable to use the fixed-route system.

This map shows the distribution of health and medical centers in Knox County and how they can be accessed by KAT services.

The City of Knoxville's Dynamic Recreation Program provides leisure and recreational opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Through education and advocacy programs, individuals build confidence, improve physical and cognitive abilities, expand support and social networks, and enhance their overall quality of life.



Other recreational opportunities are abundant at City of Knoxville and Knox County parks and greenways. **The City of Knoxville website** provides details on local parks, including information like directions, amenities, and accessible features.

Residents also benefit from **Legacy Parks Foundation** initiatives, which include projects to improve adaptive accessibility to park infrastructure.

Great Smoky Mountains and Obed Wild and Scenic River National Parks are located near Knox County, and both have a number of accessible features, including visitor centers, educational services, and trails.

Summary

Issues that challenge our community — especially those of us with disabilities — are access to higher education, employment opportunities, living wages, and greater housing options.

While the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) prohibits discrimination in jobs, schools, transportation, housing environments, and places open to the public, not all barriers to people with disabilities have been resolved. Many of the physical and social obstacles that continue to impact people with disabilities will take time and investment to fix, but work is being done.

Knox County, the City of Knoxville, and CAC have put forth resources and long-range plans to work on removing barriers. Knox County and City of Knoxville recently completed an ADA Transition Plan: a self-evaluation to identify all areas where local government can improve compliance with ADA accessibility requirements. Knox County created a new organization, DAGWould?, to determine priorities of different objectives of the plan. The City of Knoxville continues its work towards a disability friendly city – the Disability Services Office processes ADA complaints for public spaces, while the mayor’s Council on Disability Issues (CODI) advocates for greater investment in accessible public housing units.

With Baby Boomers reaching their senior years and Generation X following soon after, accommodating the population with disabilities will become an even greater challenge if supportive infrastructure is not established now. The many organizations in Knoxville and Knox County that support and advocate for people with disabilities provide hope for a future community accessible to all.

Did you know?

Public spaces are important to our residents; according to Knoxville’s recent “Disability Friendly Cities Survey,” **82% of Knox County residents ranked inclusive recreational programs to be very- to critically-important and 81% ranked accessible recreational public venues to be very- to critically-important.**

East Tennessee Children’s Hospital hosts yearly summer camps that are safe and fun for children with specific medical conditions and special needs.

Knoxville hosted the 2001 Tennessee Special Olympics Spring Games, which included roller-skating, basketball, and unified basketball. This was the second largest event in the history of the Tennessee Special Olympics!



The 7 Most Common Barriers to Participation Experienced by People with Disabilities (CDC):

1. **Attitudinal:** stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination
2. **Communication:** messages that can’t be interpreted by people with vision or hearing impairments, use of language that is difficult to understand for people with cognitive impairments
3. **Physical:** structural obstacles
4. **Policy:** denying reasonable accommodations or access to programs, services, opportunities, etc. as a result of other barriers
5. **Programmatic:** limiting effective delivery of public health or healthcare programs through lack of accessible equipment, insufficient communication with patients, and provider’s attitudes or knowledge of disabilities
6. **Social:** conditions in which people with disabilities are born, grow, live, learn, work, and age - these conditions include employment, education, and income
7. **Transportation:** unavailable, inaccessible, or inconvenient transportation options for people who are unable to drive because of their disability



Planning

KNOXVILLE | KNOX COUNTY

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