

# ISER RESEARCH SUMMARY

Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage

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## What Do Alaskans with Disabilities Need?

More than 20,000 Alaskans—4 percent of the state population—are disabled and live outside institutions. Most of them are getting medical care, but many lack special equipment, information, and other help they need.

These are among the findings of a recent ISER survey of more than 4,300 Alaska households. It is the first survey of its kind in the nation to determine how many disabled persons live on their own and what they need to continue living independently. ISER did the survey for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Alaska Department of Education, which will use the results to improve services for disabled Alaskans.

### What Disabilities Do Alaskans Have?

Most disabled Alaskans have more than one disability. The estimated 22,220 disabled Alaskans living outside institutions report about 61,000 disabilities.

Inability to walk or difficulty walking is the most common disability, followed by arthritis; deafness or hearing loss; learning disabilities; blindness or vision loss; and circulatory or respiratory problems. A variety of other disabilities are less common. (Table 1.)

### What Services Do Disabled Alaskans Need?

Figure 1 shows how many disabled Alaskans need specific services, and how many of them are getting what they need.

All disabled Alaskans need medical care, and 85 percent are receiving it—but that leaves 3,400 who aren't.

Most disabled persons also need information on their disabilities and help in getting benefits and in making their problems known. About 70 percent are receiving those services—which means several thousand are not.

**Table 1. Most Common Disabilities**

Impaired Mobility	19%
Arthritis	12%
Deafness or Hearing Loss	12%
Learning Disability	10%
Blindness or Vision Loss	9%
Circulatory or Respiratory Disorder	8%
Others	30%
Estimated Number of Alaskans with One or More Disabilities	22,220
Average Number per Person	2.75

Many disabled Alaskans also need information on special equipment or the loan of equipment, as well as newsletters to tell them about available services. Fewer than half of those who need equipment information or loans are getting what they need, and only 20 percent are receiving newsletters.

Large numbers of disabled Alaskans also need job training, centralized information and counseling about their disabilities, and support groups. Most (70 percent) are getting job training and counseling, but fewer than half get centralized information and only 20 percent belong to support groups.

### What Special Equipment Do Disabled Alaskans Need?

Figure 2 shows kinds of special equipment or information about available technology disabled Alaskans need.

Disabled Alaskans most commonly need devices to help them hear, see, or speak better (either in person or over the telephone); wheelchairs, walkers, and other devices to improve mobility; and building modifications for their homes or offices.

*This Research Summary is based on An Assessment of the Needs of Alaska Residents Who Are Disabled, by Virgene Hanna and Jack Kruse. The full report is available from ISER at a cost of 10 cents per page. This publication is printed on recycled paper.*

Most of those (85 percent) who need wheelchairs or other aids to mobility have them, and about 60 percent who need devices to help them in face-to-face communication have them. But only about half of those who need modifications to buildings have them, and only 30 percent who need devices to improve telephone communication have them. Additional equipment disabled Alaskans need but relatively few have includes adapted computers and customized vehicles.

Disabled Alaskans also need help keeping track of technological changes. Many need to be evaluated to learn what new technology might help them and to receive ongoing information on new developments. About 70 percent say they have been evaluated, but only about a third receive current information.

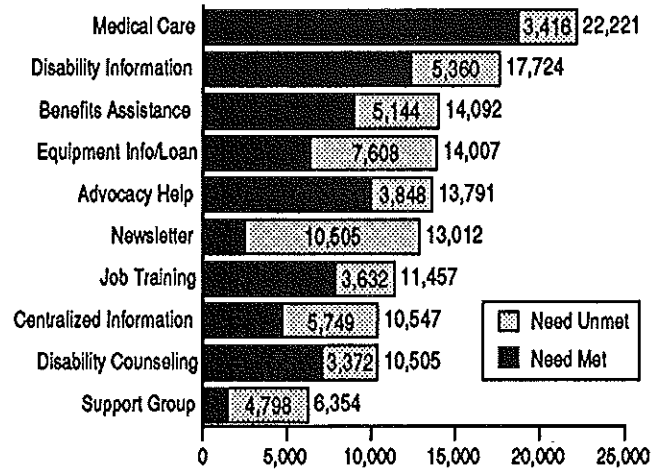
Others need help paying for new equipment, and sales and service establishments for specialized equipment. Less than half of those who need such services are getting them.

## Summary

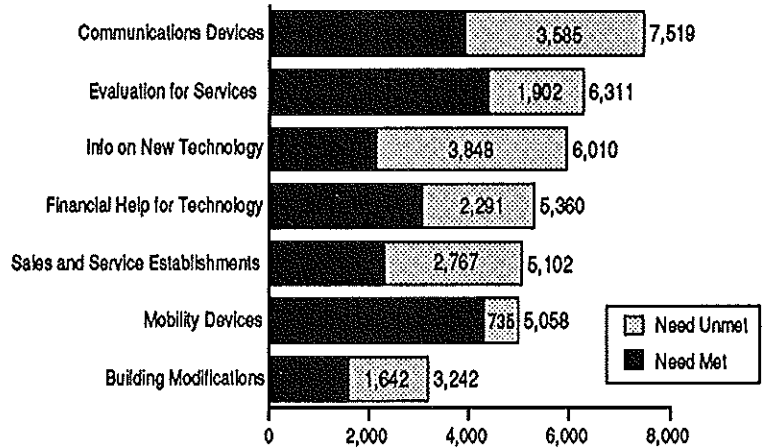
Most (but not all) disabled Alaskans are receiving the medical care they need, and most who need wheelchairs, hearing aids, and other kinds of equipment that have been available for many years have them.

What many disabled Alaskans lack are services and equipment that have been developed more recently. These include newsletters that help disabled persons keep track of new technology or treatment, and support groups for people with similar disabilities. Also, many of those who are aware of new equipment are unable to buy or borrow what they need.

**Figure 1. What Services Do Disabled Alaskans Need?**



**Figure 2. What Equipment and Information Do Disabled Alaskans Need?**



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