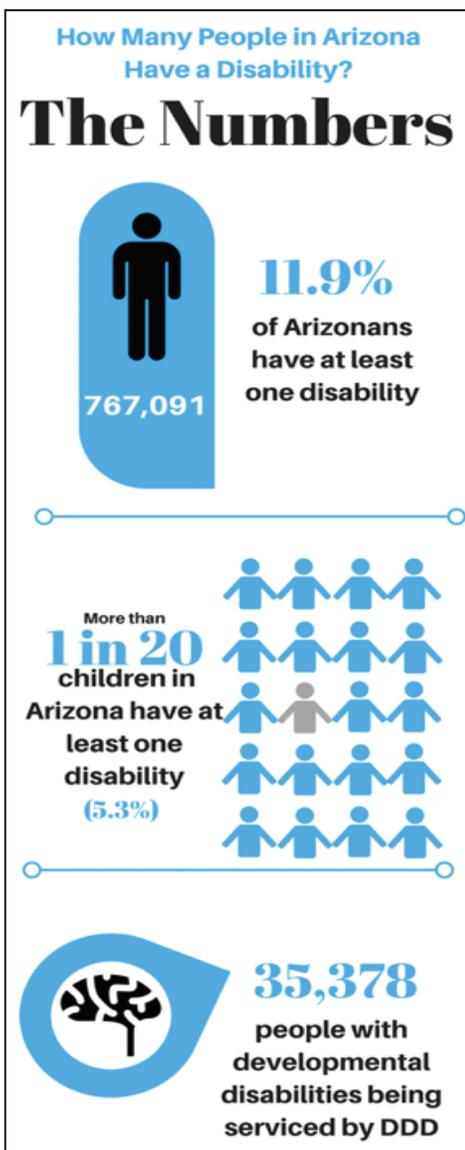


How many people in Arizona have a developmental disability?

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This is a difficult question to answer because there is no definitive source responsible for counting or tracking people with disabilities. However, there are several sources providing insight and close approximations into the number of Arizonans with developmental disabilities.

To be classified as a developmental disability by the state of Arizona, the disability must be identified before age 18 and affect at least three areas of a person's life (see "What is a developmental disability?" policy brief for a broader discussion). The difficulty of turning up a reliable estimate of the number of people with developmental disabilities in Arizona can be demonstrated by applying this definition to a few sources.

767,091 Arizonans (or 11.9 percent of the total population) indicated in the U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey they have at least one disability. However, this number does not indicate the age of the individual when the disability was identified, or if it is a developmental disability. The survey only asks if the person has difficulty hearing, with vision, cognition, walking, self-care, and independent living. Further, it does not indicate whether the diagnosis was made by a professional.

In their responses to the 2014 American Community survey, parents reported 57,013 children under the age of 18 (or 5.3 percent of Arizona's children) as having at least one disability. The most common disability reported for children ages 5 to 17 cognitive. Although the number was not collected, we can assume the majority of these children have a developmental disability.

The Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) provides formal services to Arizonan's with disabilities, including a program for individuals with developmental disabilities. In their annual report, they state that 35,378 people of all ages with developmental disabilities are currently being served by this program (DES Division of Developmental Disabilities, Family Support Annual Report, July 2014 – July 2015). However, this figure is an underestimate of those with a developmental disability in Arizona because it does not include the population that is either unaware of, or choose not to access, DES services.

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Considering the available data on this population, several respected research institutions have created estimates on the prevalence of developmental disabilities in Arizona. The Councils on Developmental Disabilities suggest using a prevalence rate of 1.8 percent, which would indicate that 122,905 Arizonans have developmental disabilities.¹ Using the best data and research available, we can estimate that approximately 60,000 children, and more than 120,000 Arizonans of all ages, have a developmental disability.

Collecting accurate numbers of people with developmental disabilities should be a priority for all future advocacy efforts. By understanding the prevalence and actually having an accurate count of this population, Arizona governments, non-profits, and communities will be better able to respond to the unique needs of this population.

¹ http://www.itacchelp.org/uploads/2011_State_Plan_Development_Resource_Updated_2_2011.pdf

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