

# Prevalence of disability among students in US medical schools

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New research has identified a higher prevalence of disability among students in U.S. allopathic medical schools (2.7 percent) than prior studies (0.3 percent to 0.6 percent), according to a study appearing in the December 6 issue of *JAMA*, a medical education theme issue.

Studying the performance of medical [students](#) with [disabilities](#) requires a better understanding of the prevalence and categories of disabilities represented. It remains unclear how many [medical students](#) have disabilities; prior estimates are out-of-date and psychological, learning, and chronic health disabilities have not been evaluated. For this study, Lisa M. Meeks, Ph.D., of the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine, and Kurt R. Herzer, Ph.D., M.Sc., of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, assessed the prevalence of all disabilities and the accommodations in use at allopathic medical schools in the United States.

From December 2014 through February 2016, an electronic, web-based survey was sent to institutionally designated disability administrators at eligible allopathic medical schools who have a federally mandated duty to assist qualified students with disabilities. The survey was designed by experts in [medical school](#) disability administration based on provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and prior research. The survey assessed the following domains: (1) total number of self-disclosed or registered students with disabilities receiving accommodations, (2) demographic characteristics of students with disabilities, (3) categories of disabilities, and (4) approved accommodations.

One hundred forty-five schools were identified; 12 were excluded. Of the 133 eligible schools, 91 completed the survey (68 percent) and 89 reported complete data and were included in the analysis. Respondents identified 1,547 students with disabilities (43 percent male), representing 2.7 percent of the total enrollment and ranging from 0 percent to 12 percent. Of these students, 98 percent received accommodations. Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was the most common disability (34 percent), followed by learning disabilities (22 percent) and psychological disabilities (20 percent). Mobility and sensory disabilities were less common. School-based testing accommodations were most frequently used (98 percent); clinical accommodations were less frequently used.

"These results underscore the limitations of studying isolated subtypes of disabilities (i.e., only mobility impairments), which may underestimate this population. The preponderance of students with ADHD, learning disabilities, and psychological disabilities suggests that these disability subtypes should be included in future research efforts, such as studies assessing the performance of appropriately accommodated students," the authors write.

**More information:** *JAMA*, [DOI: 10.1001/jama.2016.10544](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2016.10544)

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