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**Committee on Population**

**Workshop on Health and Disability among Working-Age Adults:  
Trends, Disparities, and Implications for Employment and Federal Programs**

October 15-16<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Keck Rm. 100, 500 5<sup>th</sup> St. NW  
Washington DC 20001

**Background and Goals of the Workshop**

The National Academies' Committee on Population, in collaboration with the National Institute on Aging, initiated this public workshop to bring together an interdisciplinary group of experts to discuss trends in disability and disabling morbidity among the U.S. working age population (ages 25-64). The workshop will identify key research and data priorities regarding:

- The measurement of trends and disparities in working-age disabilities and disabling morbidities;
- Social and economic factors influencing trends in disabling conditions, with a specific focus on work and employment-related drivers;
- Implications of Covid and post-Covid developments for key public programs.

One motivation for this workshop is that health and disability trends among working age populations have been less encouraging than those at older ages. Increases in working-age disability and related morbidity and disparities therein may have important implications for labor force participation and a range of public disability, health, and income benefit programs in the coming decades. These trends also have important interactions with labor markets and changing occupational distributions for accessibility and work capacity. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on working conditions (e.g., remote work) also presents opportunities to consider the role of organizational factors including those associated with the workplace. Employment is an important channel for both understanding changes in disability over time as well as potentially intervening to improve functional capacity and welfare. Discussion of research opportunities to inform such interventions, as well social safety net policies that consider functional capacity and work capacity, will be a key feature of the workshop.

**AGENDA**

**Tuesday, October 15**

**10:00am Welcome; NIA Goals for the Discussion**

After introductions, the workshop chair will preview workshop session topics: Defining, conceptualizing, and measuring disability; (2) Period and cohort trends in disabling morbidity—health and medical drivers; (3) Population disparities; (4) Contextual factors and policy influences on morbidity and disability; (5) Workforce/workplace trends in disability and disability policy; and (6) synthesis and takeaways.

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- **Malay Majumdar**, *Committee on Population*
- **Kriti Jain**, *National Institute on Aging*
- **Emily Agree**, *Johns Hopkins University*, and workshop chair

10:15am

**Session 1: Defining, conceptualizing, and measuring disability; data needs**

Guiding questions:

- ✍ What are the conceptual and technical challenges in measuring disability and estimating disability prevalence for the working age population?
- ✍ How do alternative definitions and measurement approaches affect estimates for specific populations?
- ✍ What measures are most appropriate for different purposes—e.g., population monitoring, establishing eligibility for programs, informing policies, international comparability in reporting, etc.?
- ✍ What are the key data and infrastructure needs for improving measures/statistics. How can existing data investments, particularly in longitudinal sources, be enhanced to better study disability in working age populations and how it tracks with work experiences/trajectories?
- ✍ For understanding disparities between disabled and non-disabled people, what frameworks are available for measuring health disparities that are specific to the disability context?

Presenters (15 minutes each):

- **Scott Landes** (Moderator), *Syracuse University*, committee member.
- **Bonnielin Swenor**, *Johns Hopkins University*. Key data issues; measurement framework; will also discuss, in the final session, how federal policy advances need to be considered in research supported by NIA.
- **Kathleen J. Mullen**, *University of Oregon*. Measuring work capacity.
- **Sarah Rose**, *University of Texas, Arlington*. Historical trends in working class people with disability, in workers' compensation, and in disability discrimination.
- **Anjali Forber-Pratt**, *AAHD*. Best strategies to ensure equity in ongoing and future disability measurement.

Q&A – Open Discussion

12:00pm

**Lunch**

1:00pm

**Session 2: Period and cohort trends in disabling morbidity—health and medical drivers**

Guiding questions:

- ✍ Among the working-age population, what are the health-related factors driving trends and disparities in disability and disabling morbidity (e.g., obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, physical and psychological pain)?
- ✍ What impacts have COVID-19 and long COVID had on projected trends in disability?
- ✍ What countervailing trends have emerged for different age/demographic groups? What do the various longitudinal data sources reveal?
- ✍ How are disability trends interacting with those for other health and risk factors?

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Presenters (15 minutes each):

- **Emily Agree** (Moderator)
- **Hiram Beltrán-Sánchez**, *University of California-Los Angeles*, committee member. Disability trends and trajectories in the COVID era.
- **Neil Mehta**, *University of Texas Medical Branch*. Overview of disability/physical functioning/health and the roles of obesity and related cardio-metabolic conditions.
- **Anna Zajacova**, *Western University, Ontario*. Disability trends among adults 18-44; APC trends in pain and other outcomes and links between pain and disability.

Q&A – Open Discussion

2:30pm **Break**

3:00pm **Session 3: Population disparities**

Guiding questions:

- ✍ How does the timing, types, and severity of disability and disabling morbidity differ across minoritized populations? How prevalent are early onset disabilities for different groups?
- ✍ By what pathways do structural racism/sexism and disadvantage contribute to these differences in disability, and in ableism?
- ✍ How are inequalities in disability and mortality changing across education levels? How do these inequalities contribute to differential employment opportunities/outcomes and to occurrence of other types of disability?
- ✍ What are the unique challenges to immigrant populations? To what extent are immigrant workers likely to be working in vulnerable occupations (such as care work) and at risk of injury? What access to immigrants of different statuses have to disability programs?
- ✍ Maternal morbidity as a source of midlife health disadvantage—how are earlier life events linked to midlife?

Presenters (15 minutes each):

- **Jennifer Karas Montez**, *Syracuse University* and committee member. Moderator.
- **Marc A. Garcia**, *Syracuse University*. Disability Risk among Midlife Latinos in the U.S.; An in-depth investigation of how sociodemographic factors—including nativity status, citizenship, duration in the U.S., age of migration, country of origin, and race—intersect with gender to shape distinct trajectories of impairment.
- **Taylor Hargrove**, *University of North Carolina*. Consequences of intersecting social statuses on trends in health and wellbeing across adulthood.
- **Rupa Valdez**, *University of Virginia*. Structural ableism its relationship to the broader topic of population disparities; impact of intersectionality on individual experiences.

Q&A – Open discussion

4:45pm **Closing thoughts for Day 1:** Emily, Committee members

5:00pm **Adjourn for day**

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Wednesday, October 16

9:00am **Welcome back; reflections on previous day; plan for Day 2**

- **Emily Agree**, *Johns Hopkins University*, workshop chair
- **Kriti Jain**, *National Institute on Aging*

9:15am **Session 4. Contextual factors: Policy influences on morbidity and disability**

Guiding questions:

- ✍ What is the impact of the changing policy landscape (including public health and safety net programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and SSA/SSDI) on the disabling effects of chronic illness and injuries—?
- ✍ How does disability prevalence vary across regions and states within the United States?
- ✍ How can natural experiments, such as those created by state-by-state variation in policies or environment, contribute to our understanding of the causal relationship between contextual and structural factors on disability severity and benefit program enrollment?
- ✍ How do changes in the supply of and type of housing and other aspects of the built environment affect disability prevalence?

Presenters/discussants (15 minutes each):

- **Jennifer Karas Montez** (Moderator), *Syracuse University*, committee member.
- **Philippa J. Clarke**, *University of Michigan*. The role of community and housing environments for optimizing function with aging.
- **Ellen Meara**, *Harvard University*. Structural barriers to public disability and health insurance: trends and consequences.
- **Emma Zang**, *Yale University*. The influence of state policy contexts on cognitive functioning and impairment.

Q&A – Open discussion

10:45am **Break**

11:00am **Session 5. Workforce and workplace trends in disability and disability policy**

Guiding questions:

- ✍ How have functional needs required for work changed over time? How have these changes affected the occupational distribution of workers with disabilities and disability-related unemployment?
- ✍ What are the key facilitators to inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce, including workplace accommodations and employment/benefit policies.
- ✍ To what extent have COVID and post-COVID era changes to the nature of the workplace affected disability prevalence overall and by occupation?
- ✍ What policies and practices—both positive and exploitive (e.g., subminimum wages)—affect employment of individuals with intellectual or other severe disabilities?

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- ✍ What have been the effects of programs and disability policies on workers' participation and well-being (e.g., the effectiveness of the ADA in ensuring employer accommodations and assessing effectiveness). How do the outcomes of U.S. policies compare with those enacted in other countries?

Presenters/discussants (15 minutes each):

- **Emily Agree**, Moderator.
- **Nicole Maestas**, *Harvard Medical School*, committee member. Social Security Disability reform and implications for employment.
- **Ari Ne'eman**, *Harvard University*. Impact of the pandemic on disability employment trends-- compositional changes versus shifts in employment prospects.
- **Douglas Kruse**, *Rutgers University*. How do employer disability practices affect disability employment outcomes?
- **Luigi Pistaferri**, *Stanford University*. A fresh look at evidence on the employment effects of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Q&A – Open discussion

12:45pm

**Lunch**

1:45pm

**Session 6: Synthesis and takeaways—research gaps, data and measurement needs, policy directions.**

Workshop steering committee members each provide takeaways, followed by sponsors, presenters, and open discussion.

3:00pm

**Adjourn**