

Using Big Data in Advocating for Services

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**Wisconsin Council of the
Blind & Visually Impaired**

Why Data Matters

Without data, you're just another person with an opinion.

-W. Edwards Deming

Lived Experience + Data + Connection
to Trends + Request = **Powerful
Advocacy Message**

BVI-Related Data Has Been Sparse

We had “big picture” information on the number of people with vision loss, growth projections and unemployment statistics, but little else.

This disadvantaged us when seeking resources from health and social service providers.

What Information Matters?

- How big is the population of people with vision impairment?
- How are people with vision impairment different from people without vision impairment?
- Are people with vision impairment evenly distributed across our state?

Aim of the Big Data Project

- Provide state level data on prevalence of blindness and low vision among people aged 65 years and over
- Provide county level estimates of the prevalence of blindness and low vision in each state

Aim of the Big Data Project 2

- Provide state level data on people with and without blindness and low vision on:
 - Health
 - Chronic Conditions
 - Health Related Quality of Life
 - Disability Measures
 - Income and Poverty
 - Education

Sources of Data

- **The American Community Survey**
 - Administered by the United States Census
 - Provides local and national leaders with information they need for programs, economic development, emergency management, and understanding local issues and conditions.
 - Estimates can be made at the county level

Sources of Data 2

- **The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System**
 - Administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 - Collects state data about U.S. residents regarding their health-related risk behaviors, chronic health conditions, and use of preventive services
 - Estimates can be made at the state level

Support for the WI Big Data Report

- Vision Forward Association
- Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired
- Industries for the Blind & Visually Impaired
- Beyond Vision

Demographic Characteristics

- 4.2% of adults 65 and older in Wisconsin report blindness or difficulty seeing, even with glasses or contacts
- Incidence is slightly higher in women than men
- Race and Ethnicity
 - 3.6% White with Visual Impairment
 - 12.1% Black with Visual Impairment

Demographic Characteristics

- 40% have not graduated from high school
- 30% have incomes below \$20,000
 - Wisconsin's poverty level income is \$12,760

Geographic Distribution

- Milwaukee County is a high prevalence county, but several surrounding counties, particularly to the north and west, have much lower prevalence
- Northern and more rural counties have a higher prevalence and very limited resources

Chronic Conditions

- Higher rates of stroke, arthritis, diabetes, kidney disease, depression and hearing impairment
- 49.2% of individuals reporting vision impairment also report hearing impairment

Health Related Quality of Life

- More than twice as likely to report poor or fair health
- Almost three times as likely to report frequent physical distress
- About two times as likely to report frequent mental distress and frequent limitations in activity

Disability Status

Activity Disability

Concentrating / Remembering

23.7% with VI versus 4.5% without VI

Walking / Climbing Stairs

65.7% with VI versus 20.3% without VI

Disability Status 2

Activity Disability

Dressing / Bathing

30.2% with VI versus 3.9% without Vi

Running Errands

42.8% with VI versus 4.9% without VI

Social Determinants of Health and Health Equity

- Older adults with visual impairments are more likely to have poorer health, decreased quality of life and increased disability
- Also have lower incomes and less education
- Lower social-economic status also creates barriers to care

Big Data Report

Contributions

- State Specific data from the BRFSS and ACS
- Only study to examine health, chronic conditions, health-related quality of life, and disability measures among older people who are blind and have low vision at the state level
- Only study to provide county level estimates of blindness and low vision for older people
- Recent — 2019 — data from BRFSS & ACS
- Only study where all this material resides in the same document

Next Steps

- Outreach to local and state legislators and policy makers
- Ongoing collaborative advocacy efforts
 - Health Equity
 - SDOH
- Opportunities for additional funding using this data
- Future additional reports on working age and pediatric populations

Your Advocacy Matters

Self-Care

- Build your blindness skills (O&M, daily living, cooking, access technology, etc.)
- Reduce your risk of falls and medication errors.
- Maintain hobbies and social connections.

Your Advocacy Matters 2

Care Providers

- Share the document, “Key Data On Older Adults with Vision Loss in Wisconsin” with your care providers.
- WCBlind.org/Vision-Loss-Data

Your Advocacy Matters

Public Policy

- Budget:
 - Support \$135,600 for an additional vision rehabilitation specialist position
 - Medicaid Expansion

Your Advocacy Matters

Public Policy

- Legislation:
 - AB 148/SB 245 – regarding Medicaid eligibility and reapplication every six months

Comments? Questions?

Contact us at:

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