



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

UNDERCOUNT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE U. S. CENSUS MAY REDUCE VITAL SERVICE THAT COULD DIMINISH THEIR HEALTH

Accurate Census data on people with disabilities is essential to ensure that public policy based on Census data distributes adequate resources to people with disabilities.

A forum was held on “Politics, Policy and the 2010 Decennial Census” at the Brookings Institution. Presenters at the forum were staff from the U.S. Census Bureau, representatives from undercounted groups and policy experts associated with the census.

Summary

Census data is disaggregated into sub-groups. People with disabilities are the largest group of differential participants in the census study. Data indicate there are approximately 50 million people in the U.S. with physical and/or mental impairments. People with disability are a difficult-to-count population, because data are acquired through proxies. There are also a disproportionate number of people with disabilities who reside in economically disadvantaged households. This group of people is unlikely to be visible during the data-gathering process, and few have knowledge of the census or its purpose.

There is impressive evidence that people with mental impairments are undercounted. School-age disability prevalence due to mental impairments is about 2/3 of the disabled population. However, the prevalence of disability due to mental impairments nearly vanishes when counting adult and elderly populations. One-third of prevalence of disability is due to the physical impairments of arthritis and low back pain alone.

Disability Prevention Issue

Census data is related to public policy that dictates how human resources are distributed. Undercounting a population can result in fewer human services for that group. The U.S. has ethnic and racial categories of vulnerable populations that lack adequate human resources for a healthy life. There is concern that the disability population is not listed as a group of differential participation in the census. The prevalence of disability in people between age 5 and age 15 is 6%, while the prevalence of disability in people over age 75 is 53%. Health diminishes with age, leading to disability. An accurate count of people with disabilities is necessary so that an adequate share of human resources can be allocated to programs that prevent diminished health that can lead to secondary disabling conditions.

Activity

A letter was written to the Chief of the Management Division of the U.S. Census to comment on his presentations regarding differential participation and undercounted groups, which did not include people with disabilities.

Principle

An effective advertising campaign should be conducted that results in an accurate count of people with disabilities in the U.S. census.