

# Landmark study shows greater health problems, barriers to health services for millions with disability

**New WHO-Gallup study shows millions of people with disability struggle to access vital health services and assistance, calls on governments to better address their needs.**

**GENEVA** - A landmark WHO-Gallup study covering nearly 1 billion people shows that sizable populations living with severe disability face more health problems and major barriers to accessing health services and to participating in work, community and family life.

The study – the first of its kind that ties WHO’s Brief Model Disability Survey methodology to Gallup’s world-renowned World Poll methodology – and funded by the United States Agency for International Development - USAID, covers three countries; India, Laos and Tajikistan.

Over 150 million people are living with severe disability in the three countries, with nearly one in four adults (23%) living with severe disability in Laos, 16% in India and 8% of adults in Tajikistan.

People with severe disability tend to be older, and there are more women living with severe disability than men in all three countries. Driven by population growth, ageing and a rise in non-communicable diseases, the report shows that the prevalence of severe disability is on the rise.

“This data marks a clear call to governments in India, Laos, Tajikistan - and everywhere - to step up their efforts to build more equitable societies,” says Alarcos Cieza, WHO’s global coordinator for the programmes on sensory functions, disability and rehabilitation.

“What we need is policies and actions that target people with severe disability and chronic conditions, and that boost access for people living with disability. This should include barrier-free health services, barrier-free public transport and accessible spaces to socialize.”

People with higher levels of disability have more health problems. 3 out of 4 people with severe disability reported at least one health condition, with over 40% of people with severe disability reporting health problems that prevent them from doing things other people their own age can do.

People with disability are more likely to need assistive devices, such as glasses, hearing aids or wheelchairs, and there is a huge unmet need – up to 30% in Laos for people with severe disability - for quality, affordable and user-friendly aids.

“People with disability have the right to participate fully and equally in all walks of life. This crucial data shows the many areas where governments must take urgent action to boost inclusivity,” says **USAID**.

“The data also shows the huge opportunity we have to empower people with disability to realize their full potential: if governments succeed in creating equal opportunities, it would have incredible positive consequences for the health, stability and prosperity for our communities.”

A lack of ramps, lifts, accessible housing and public transport makes life far-harder for well over half of people living with disability in all three countries. They are also far more likely to live in poverty.

“The study has far broader implications than the three countries covered,” says Andrew Rzepa, Partner at Gallup. “It shows how data collection on disability can be implemented in countries in a scalable, robust, cross country comparable manner. It also helps to build a fuller picture of the different barriers and challenges people with disability face.”

“The study goes beyond physical limitations to focus on the experiential, emotional, social and economic lens. With a fuller understanding of the concerns and demands of people with disability, better targeted policies can be developed.”