

# Olmstead Quality of Life Survey

August 2020 brief: Social Integration and Engagement

As part of its effort to enable people to live, learn, work, and enjoy life in the most integrated setting, the State of Minnesota measures quality of life over time. This year's Olmstead Quality of Life Survey will tell us where the state is doing well, where there is still work to be done, and what impacts COVID-19 is having. These briefs can inform policy changes to improve quality of life.

## **The Olmstead Quality of Life Survey is designed to measure and track quality of life for Minnesotans with disabilities who receive services in certain residential and day settings. You can use this information to inform improvements to those services.**

The purpose of the Olmstead Quality of Life Survey is to talk directly with **Minnesotans with disabilities** about the quality of their lives. The results of this survey are critically important to understanding how well Minnesota is meeting the goals of its **Olmstead Plan** and for measuring change in quality of life for Minnesotans with disabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this information more important than ever because life has changed for everyone, and we want to know: have Minnesotans with disabilities been affected less, the same, or more? This is crucial knowledge for policymaking.

Decision-makers in the state can use these project briefs and survey findings to inform legislation, address gaps in services and systems for Minnesotans with disabilities, and discuss how the state can balance rights and safety in both crisis and normal times. Information learned about social integration and engagement, for example, can inform efforts to close gaps in services and systems meant to promote social integration.

The survey is designed to gather input from Minnesotans with disabilities who receive services in any of the **potentially segregated settings** defined in the Olmstead Plan. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) begins with the assumption that every person with a disability is entitled to live in regular or typical environments. The goal of the Olmstead Plan is for people with disabilities to live, learn, work, and enjoy life in the **most integrated setting** possible. This means people with disabilities have access to an array of services that allow them to interact with nondisabled people to the fullest extent possible.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, people with disabilities, advocates, service providers, and policymakers were having important conversations

This is the first of four briefs about the Olmstead Quality of Life Survey. These briefs, along with survey results, can inform efforts to improve quality of life for Minnesotans with disabilities.

The **Improve**Group | [theimprovetgroup.com/olmstead-quality-life-survey](https://theimprovetgroup.com/olmstead-quality-life-survey)

**Minnesotans with disabilities:** The focus population for this survey is Minnesotans with disabilities who receive services in potentially segregated settings, referred to in this brief as "Minnesotans with disabilities."

**Olmstead Plan:** A broad series of key activities Minnesota must accomplish to ensure people with disabilities are living, learning, working, and enjoying life in the most integrated setting.

**Potentially segregated settings:** Residential and day settings identified in the Olmstead Plan as having the potential to be segregated. These settings have characteristics of institutions, including a lack of control over

about how to balance the rights and safety of Minnesotans with disabilities as they continued to increase their social integration and engagement. Amid a pandemic, these conversations are even more critical.

### **Since 2016, The Improve Group has partnered with the State of Minnesota’s Olmstead Implementation Office to carry out the Olmstead Quality of Life Survey.**

The Improve Group is a St. Paul-based research and evaluation consulting firm. In the survey, we ask Minnesotans with disabilities about their daily lives and their quality of life, including in four main areas:

1. Social integration and engagement
2. Freedom to make choices
3. Perceived qualities of life
4. Presence of close and valued relationships

Findings can also inform changes the state can make to increase integration for all people with disabilities and all who are at risk for experiencing isolation and segregation.

This work is important because we know from people with disabilities that they experience more segregation and discrimination than people without disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990 to address the barriers faced by people with disabilities and provided protections against discrimination. In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court held that under the ADA, people with disabilities have the right to live in the community whenever possible. This ruling [became known as the Olmstead decision](#) and addressed the issues around segregation and the importance of a person's right to enjoy friendships, family connections, work and economic independence, and community cultural opportunities. In 2013, the Minnesota Olmstead Subcabinet was established to ensure that community integration and person-centered planning was a priority for people with disabilities whenever possible. On March 29, 2019, Governor Tim Walz issued Executive Order 19-13 to continue the role of the Subcabinet and expand its membership.

### **This year is the third time we are asking Minnesotans with disabilities to take the survey.**

The first survey was in 2017 and provided **baseline** data about quality of life for the 2,005 Minnesotans with disabilities who participated. In 2018, we conducted the first follow-up survey with 500 people who took the baseline survey. This year’s survey will engage 550 people: 500 who participated in the

where people live, with whom they live, access to family and friends, and attending a job or school they choose. The term “potentially” is used to indicate these settings may be restrictive for one person but not for another.

**Most integrated setting:** A setting that enables individuals with disabilities to interact with non-disabled persons to the fullest extent possible

**Baseline:** The standard by which future survey results are compared to determine any changes.

baseline and 50 people who as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color, as part of a new sample described below.

The survey is **longitudinal** with the goal of measuring change over time. We know from the baseline that people have a moderate amount of control over their personal life; generally rate their quality of life as good; had about one outing a day; and that their closest relationships were most often with relatives and paid staff. At the time of the first follow-up one year later, we learned there were not yet any significant changes over time. In comparison to similar studies from other states, Minnesota ranks high in the average number of close relationships and perceived quality of life, but low in decision-making control and in how much meaningful contact people have with non-disabled citizens when out and about in their communities.

Minnesotans with disabilities are eligible to complete the survey this year if they were receiving services in certain residential and day programs in 2016 and they completed the baseline survey. Because of these specific criteria, the results are not **generalizable** to all Minnesotans with disabilities. However, you can use findings to inform ideas and decisions to make positive changes for all Minnesotans.

### **We are making some changes this year to hear from more Minnesotans who identify as BIPOC.**

In the past, due to multiple factors, the Olmstead Quality of Life Survey has not engaged enough Minnesotans with disabilities who identify as **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** to be able to answer important questions about racial equity and existing racial disparities. To fill this gap, this year's survey includes a new sample of Minnesotans who identify as BIPOC, have a disability, and meet the selection criteria from the baseline survey.

### **We are also making changes to abide by COVID-19 safety precautions.**

In previous years, survey participants met in person with interviewers to complete the survey. However, due to COVID-19 risks, we are not able to meet in person to complete the survey this year. Instead, Minnesotans with disabilities will be meeting with interviewers virtually or over the phone to complete the survey.

**Longitudinal:** A data collection approach that measures impact over multiple years by following the same group over time.

**Generalizable:** When research findings from a sample group (e.g., people who completed the survey) are applicable to a broader population.

**BIPOC:** People who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or as People of Color. The term BIPOC is used to highlight the unique history and experiences of Black and Indigenous communities in relationship to the United States. People of Color is not a homogenous group and is a broad term that encompasses many nuances, experiences, and communities.

## Through the social integration and engagement module, we are learning about how integrated people are today, how that has changed over time, and the effects of COVID-19.

**Social integration and engagement** is one of the four main topics in the survey. We have learned that integration, membership, social inclusion, and participation are central to quality of life for Minnesotans with disabilities, just like for everyone else. Survey questions in this module ask about activities in everyone's daily life, such as how many hours they work, how much time they spend volunteering, how often they visit with friends and family, and how often they participate in community events.

COVID-19 public safety precautions such as Minnesota's Stay-At-Home order, remote work, virtual gatherings, and the cancellation of events have decreased social integration and engagement for all Minnesotans. We anticipate this has had a far more negative impact on Minnesotans with disabilities. With current restrictions, Minnesotans with disabilities have fewer opportunities than ever to be in situations without people with disabilities and fewer opportunities to participate in the activities that are safe right now, such as going to a park. The impacts of this change in people's lives demands measurement, analysis, understanding, and, if possible, remedies.

We have updated the survey to reflect the ways all our daily lives have changed due to COVID-19. For example, when we ask people how many times they have participated in activities, we will now distinguish between in-person and virtual events. This way, we will understand the degree to which people have access to social opportunities like virtual gatherings. We will also aim to collect comparable information from Minnesotans who do not identify as having a disability, asking these people about their daily activities before and during COVID-19. We can then compare this to what we learn from Minnesotans with disabilities.

## These project briefs will help you better understand the Olmstead Quality of Life Survey and its findings.

This is the first of four briefs, which will cover the four main survey topics between now and October 2020. The project briefs and Olmstead Quality of Life Survey findings will be available on the [Olmstead Quality of Life website](#), the [Olmstead Implementation Office website](#), and the Olmstead Implementation Office's social media pages. The next three project briefs will discuss freedom to make choices (August); perceived qualities of life (September); and presence of close and valued relationships (October). This project brief was created by [The Improve Group](#). Resources used to create the project brief include [Minnesota's Olmstead Plan](#), the [Minnesota Olmstead Plan: Demographic Analysis, Segregated Settings Counts, Targets and Timelines](#), and this [Statement of the Department of Justice on Enforcement of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead v. L.C.](#)

### Social integration and engagement:

Opportunities to meaningfully interact with people outside of the disability system.