



Town of North Attleborough  
**MUNICIPAL COMMISSION ON DISABILITY**  
SURVEY REPORT - NOVEMBER 10, 2023

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# North Attleborough Commission on Disability Survey Report - November 2023

Prepared by Melinda Bernardo Cuerda, on behalf of the North Attleborough Commission on Disability

## **Overview**

### Context

The Commission on Disability's (COD) mission is to remove barriers and raise awareness about disability and to serve in an advisory capacity related to policy decisions within the town. To meet this mission, the COD must understand the issues and concerns of the people with disabilities in town.

To that end, the COD conducted a survey to begin to understand the various disability-related needs and challenges within North Attleborough and to establish a baseline for understanding its own impact in the town.

### Purpose

The purpose of this report is to highlight data from the survey that informs the COD's budget recommendations to the town. Out of scope for this report is additional data on which the COD may want to act. That information will be discussed separately in COD meetings.

### Methods

The survey was administered digitally and on paper. It included screening criteria for residency and disability. Survey responses were collected from 9/18/2023 - 10/6/2023. The survey received a total of 176 responses, 126 of which met the screening criteria. The information presented below is from the 126 eligible responses.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

1. Developmental, learning, and physical disabilities as well as mental health were the most frequently identified disabilities.
2. Educational and medical/health services were the most commonly sought services for all age groups. They are also the most common services that are still needed for most age groups.
  - a. The 65+ age cohort identified personal assistance and transportation as services they still need.

3. For town budget priorities, respondents identified funding for special education programs in schools and in town, improved transportation, and improved sidewalks/accessibility downtown as top choices.

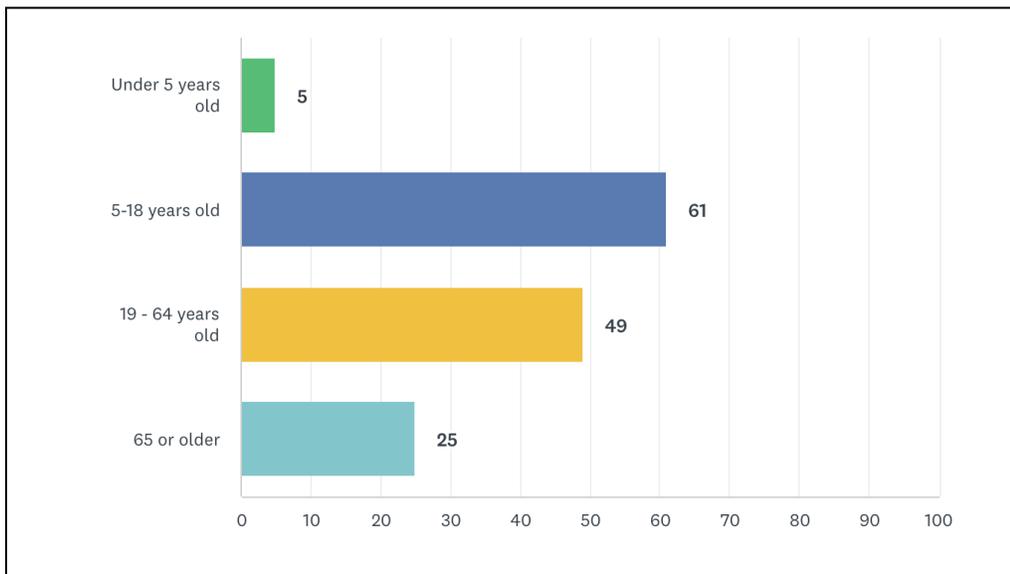
**Recommendation:** The COD recommends prioritizing funding for special education programs both in and outside of schools, improved transportation options, and continued improvements to downtown sidewalks.

## Detailed Findings

### Demographics & Disability

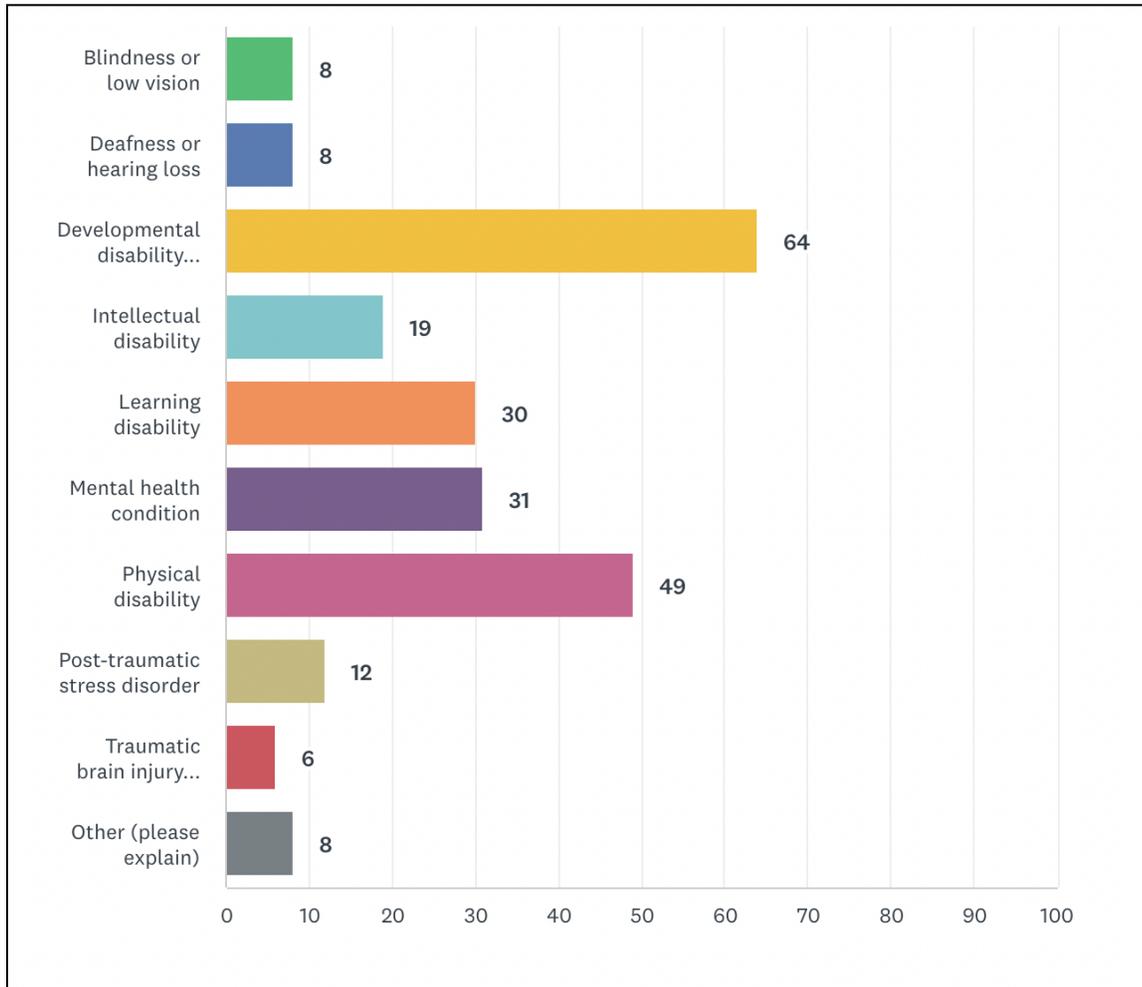
The school age cohort (age 5-18) accounted for the majority of the replies (n=61), followed by responses from the adult cohort (age 19-64) (n=49).

**Figure 1: What age is the person or people you identified above?**



Within all groups, developmental and physical disabilities were the most common choices.

**Figure 2: Which disability or disabilities do the person or people identified above have?**



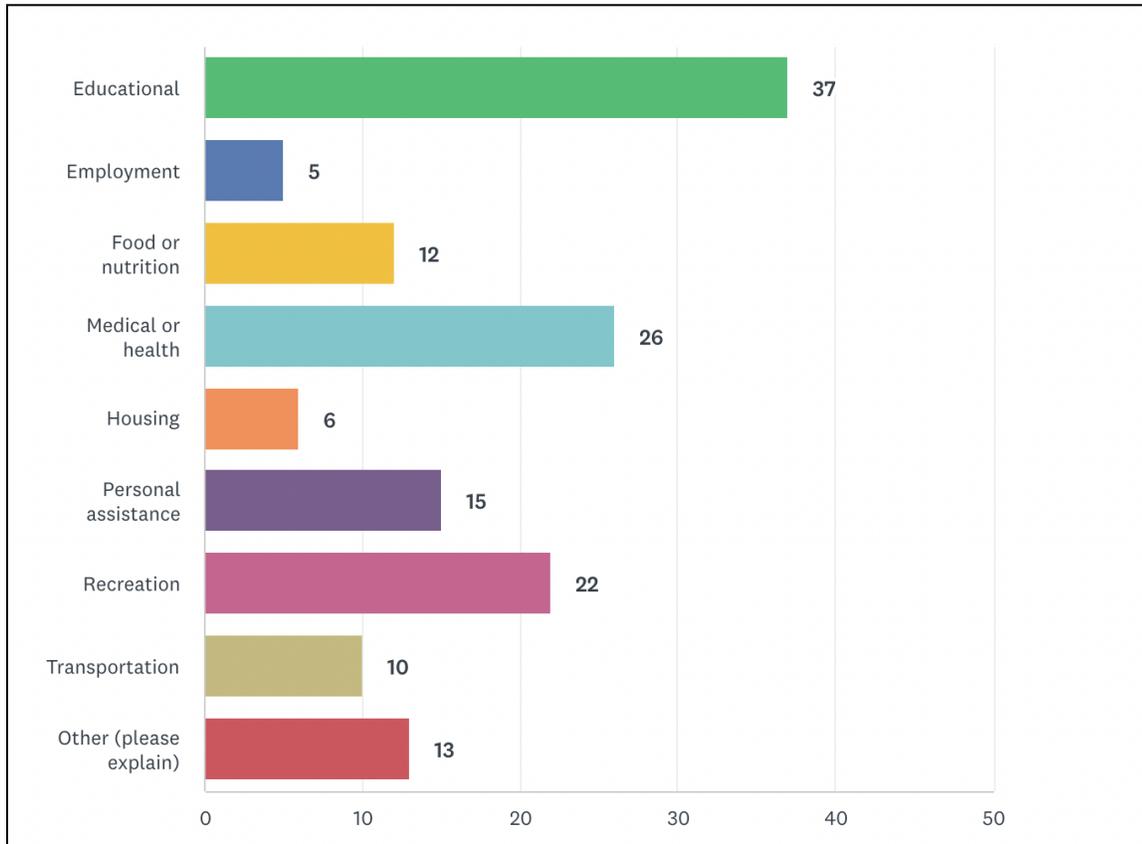
When segmented by age group, the child and school age cohorts (under 5 and 5-18 years) identified developmental disabilities as the most common disability (n=49), followed by learning disabilities (n=26). For the adult cohort (18-64) physical disabilities (n=27) and developmental disabilities (n=20) were the most common. For the senior cohort (65+) physical disabilities (n=18) were most common. For all groups, mental health was the third most common choice (n=31).

### Need and Availability of Services

In the past year, more than half of survey respondents (n=65) have looked for disability-related services or assistance with varying levels of success. Some respondents found the services they needed (n=21), while others partially found services (n=27). The remaining respondents (n=17) were not able to find what they needed for various reasons, including not knowing where to look, struggling with paperwork, being denied services, or the services not existing.

The types of services sought varied, but education, health, and recreational services were the most frequently identified.

**Figure 3: What type of help or services did you look for?**



Respondents who indicated they were not able to find the services they sought, or were only partially able to find the services they sought, identified several reasons for this. These included inability to find information on available services, lack of available resources, and eligibility. One participant, who identified as being the parent of two children with disabilities, noted trouble finding extracurricular activities suitable for their children:

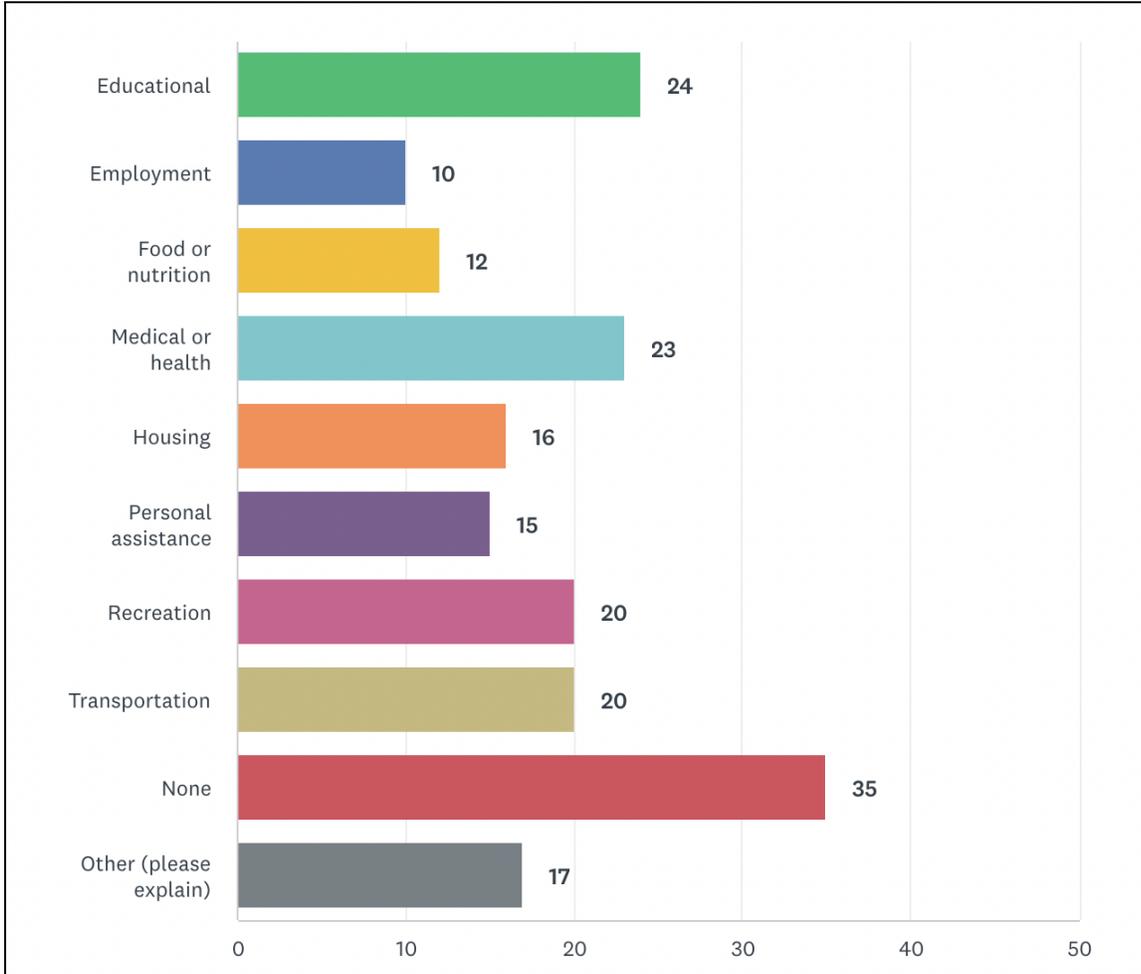
*“I think there’s a huge gap in extracurricular activities in town for children with disabilities as well as affordable camp activities for students with disabilities over the summer. I’ve spoken with a number of parents with the same frustrations.”*

Another respondent noted that it was difficult to find information on services:

*“There doesn’t seem to be a centralized place to go for questions around transportation, recreation, volunteering, employment, etc. We have to generally go into Attleboro for assistance.”*

Respondents were also asked what type of services were still needed. Educational and medical/health were the top responses, with recreation and transportation as next most common. This suggests that while some services may be provided, the full need is not met.

**Figure 4: What, if any, disability-related help or services are currently needed by you or someone else, but you don't know where to find them?**



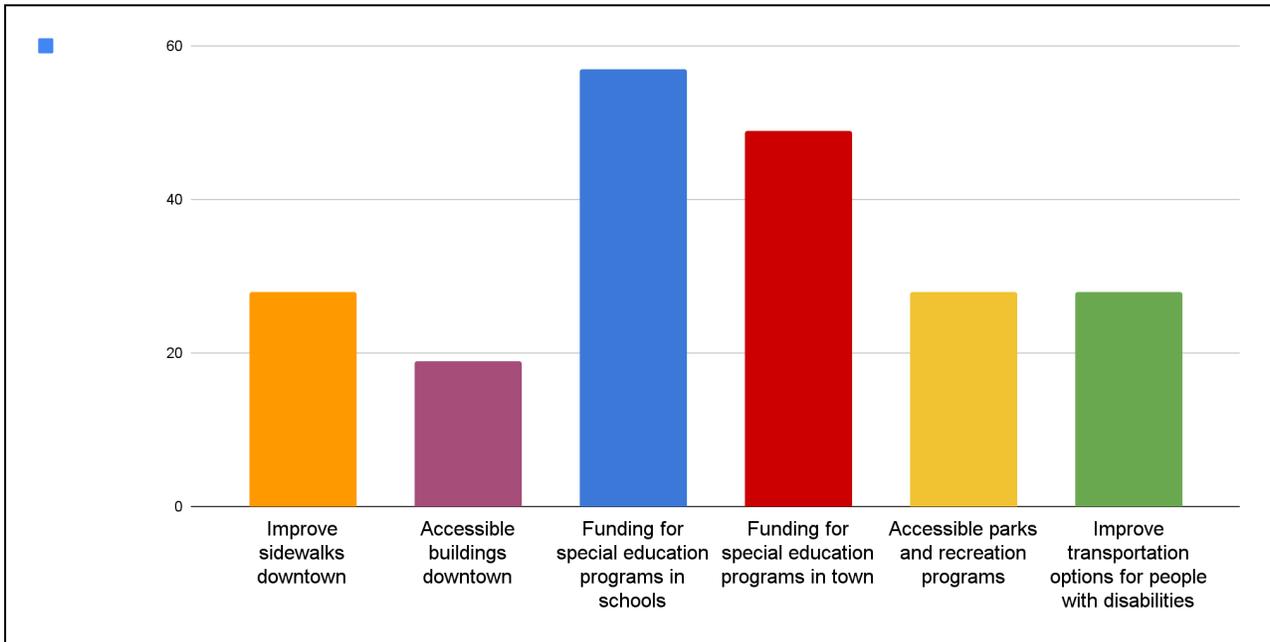
Also notable is the difficulty of navigating available services for a new disability. One resident explained:

*“Look when you get a diagnosis whether it be you or someone you care for. It is devastating. Getting 15 pages of vendors to weed through doesn't help. Or you call Council of Aging. My husband's coming home after an amputation and you get answers like does he need a cane or walker. Just makes you want to cry.”*

### Budget Planning Priorities

Respondents were asked for their opinion on where funds in the town budget should be allocated to support people with disabilities. They were given specific choices as well as an open text field. Overall, funding for special education programs in schools (n=57) and in town (n=49) were the most frequent answers.

**Figure 5: The town will be budget planning soon. Where should North Attleborough spend money to better support people with disabilities?**



When segmented by age, the top choices for the child and school cohorts mirrored the entire sample, with funding for special education programs in schools (n=46) and special education programs in town (n=36). For the adult cohort (18-64) the top choice was funding for special education programs in schools (n=17) and improved transportation (n=16). For the 65+ cohort improved transportation (n=12) and improved sidewalks downtown (n=9) were the top choices.

Respondents also offered their own ideas on how the town could allocate funds, which included ideas for stretching its conception of disability:

*“Accessibility is not always about physical accommodations. It's important sidewalks, buildings, and parks are physically available to everyone in town, but there needs to be a focus on all disabilities. Quiet times, 1:1 aides, small-group activities, etc... are all important accommodations the town overlooks consistently.”*

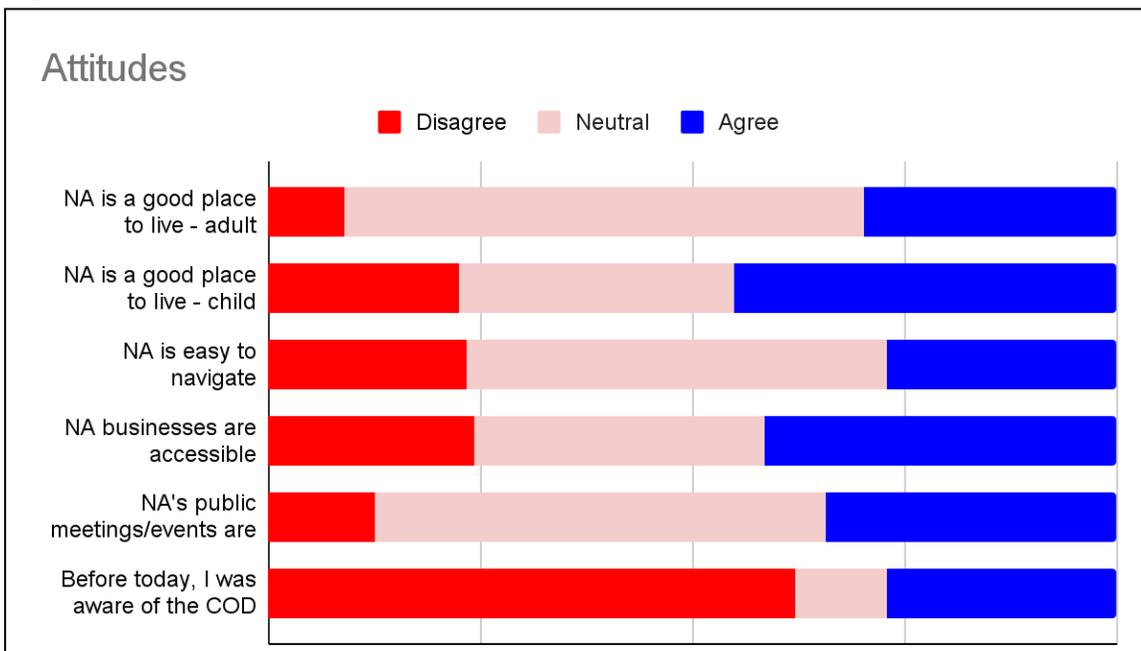
*“I honestly do not know how to do it, but educating the community at large about adults with Autism and/or Intellectual Disabilities. People seem to relate a bit more to children with these disabilities, but do not have an understanding or tolerance once these children grow up. They may not physically look different, but they and their families want to be accepted for who they are.”*

### Attitudes about town accessibility

The survey asked six questions to gauge attitudes about accessibility in town and to determine people’s knowledge of the COD. Respondents were asked whether North Attleborough was a good place to live for adults and children with disabilities, whether the town and its meetings and events were accessible, and whether respondents were aware of the COD. Answers to these questions provided a baseline on attitudes and should be asked in subsequent surveys to gauge changes. For most questions, the most common answer was the midpoint of the scale (“Neutral”). This suggests either the survey respondents do not have enough information about the topics to make a clear choice or they truly feel “neutral” about the topic. Subsequent surveys should track these metrics to determine if these trends change. Ideally, in the future the goal is to trend away from “neutral” and toward positive responses for these questions (Fig 6).

Two questions, however, did not have neutral as the most common response. Respondents felt that North Attleborough is a good place to live as a child with a disability (n=50). Respondents also strongly disagreed that they were aware of the COD prior to the survey (n=69). This particular response indicates the need for the COD to raise its profile within the town.

**Figure 6: Attitudes**



### **Next Steps**

The survey provided valuable data to help the COD advise the town on funding priorities for residents with disabilities. Additionally, the COD should consider using the survey data to determine potential next steps and future projects they would like to engage in. These future projects should include success metrics based on goals established by the COD. Future surveys, for

example, administered every two years, should show positive trends in areas related to these future projects. Future surveys may also be administered and distributed through additional avenues with the goal of reaching more residents.