



# An Introduction to the Washington Group Short Set on Functioning

**Cordell Golden**

**Division of Analysis and Epidemiology**

**FCSM Research & Policy Conference**

**October 25, 2023**

# Overview

- The UN International Seminar on the Measurement of Disability
- The Washington Group on Disability Statistics
- The WG Short Set on Functioning
- The ACS disability question set

# UN International Seminar on the Measurement of Disability

In June 2001, the UN convened a seminar to review and assess the current status of methods used in population-based data collection activities to measure disability in national statistical systems.

- Bring together a broad array of developed and developing country experts in disability measurement for statistical reporting;
- Develop recommendations and priorities to advance the work on measurement of disability;
- Contribute to building a network of institutions and experts, including producers and users of disability statistics to implement developments in this field;
- The work to achieve these objectives should build on accepted international standards and guidelines.

# The Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG)

In February 2002, the WG held its first meeting

- To guide the development of a small set(s) of general disability measures, suitable for use in censuses, to provide basic necessary information on disability throughout the world.
- To recommend one or more extended sets of survey items to measure disability to be used as components of population surveys or as supplements to specialty surveys. These extended sets of survey items will be related to the general measures.
- To address the methodological issues associated with the measurement of disability considered most pressing by the City Group participants.

# The WG is Country-Driven

- Countries have ownership:
  - Representatives include the National Statistical Offices of 168 countries and territories, international organizations, and organizations that represent persons with disabilities
- The Secretariat for the WG is located at NCHS (US).
- The chosen Chairperson for the WG also at NCHS (US).
- A Steering Committee oversees the WG work plan.
- Work Groups carry out the work plan, input from all members.
- Emphasis on evidence and transparency, with extensive testing of data collection tools in multiple countries.

# Developing the WG Tools: The WG-SS

# Disability Data Needs

National data on the population with disabilities are needed by countries:

- To support the development and evaluation of policies and programs to enhance social participation
- To both implement and monitor the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- For disaggregation in monitoring progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals

# WG Short Set Objectives

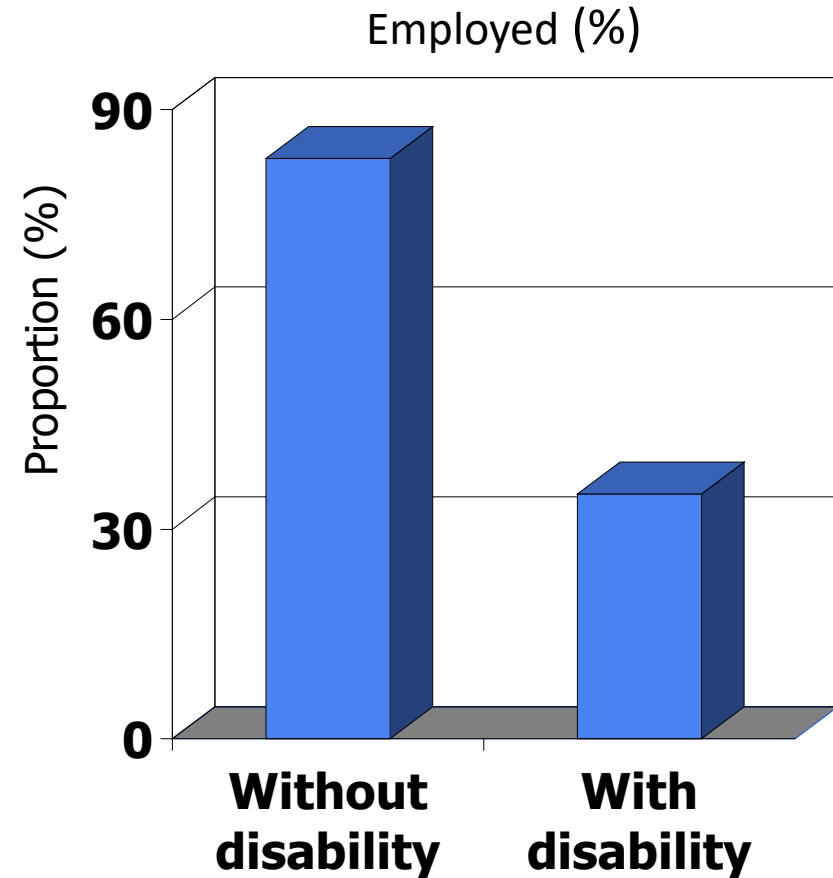
- Identify persons with similar types and degree of functional limitations in basic actions regardless of nationality or culture;
- Represent the majority (*but not all*) persons with limitations in basic actions; and
- Represent commonly occurring limitations in functioning domains that can be captured in the census context.

The WG defined an approach to measuring disability based on identifying those who: because of **difficulties** doing certain **universal, basic actions**, are at greater **risk** than the general population for **limitations in participation**.



# WG Purpose for Measurement: Equalization of Opportunities

- Seeks to identify all those *at greater risk* than the general population for limitations in participation
- Disability used as a *demographic* for disaggregation



# WG Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS)

1. Do you have difficulty **seeing** even if wearing glasses?
2. Do you have difficulty **hearing** even if using a hearing aid?
3. Do you have difficulty **walking or climbing steps**?
4. Do you have difficulty **remembering or concentrating**?
5. Do you have difficulty with **self-care**, such as washing all over or dressing?
6. Using your usual language, do you have difficulty **communicating** (for example understanding or being understood by others)?

## Response categories:

No difficulty / Some difficulty / A lot of difficulty / Cannot do at all

# Disability Prevalence, U.S. 2021

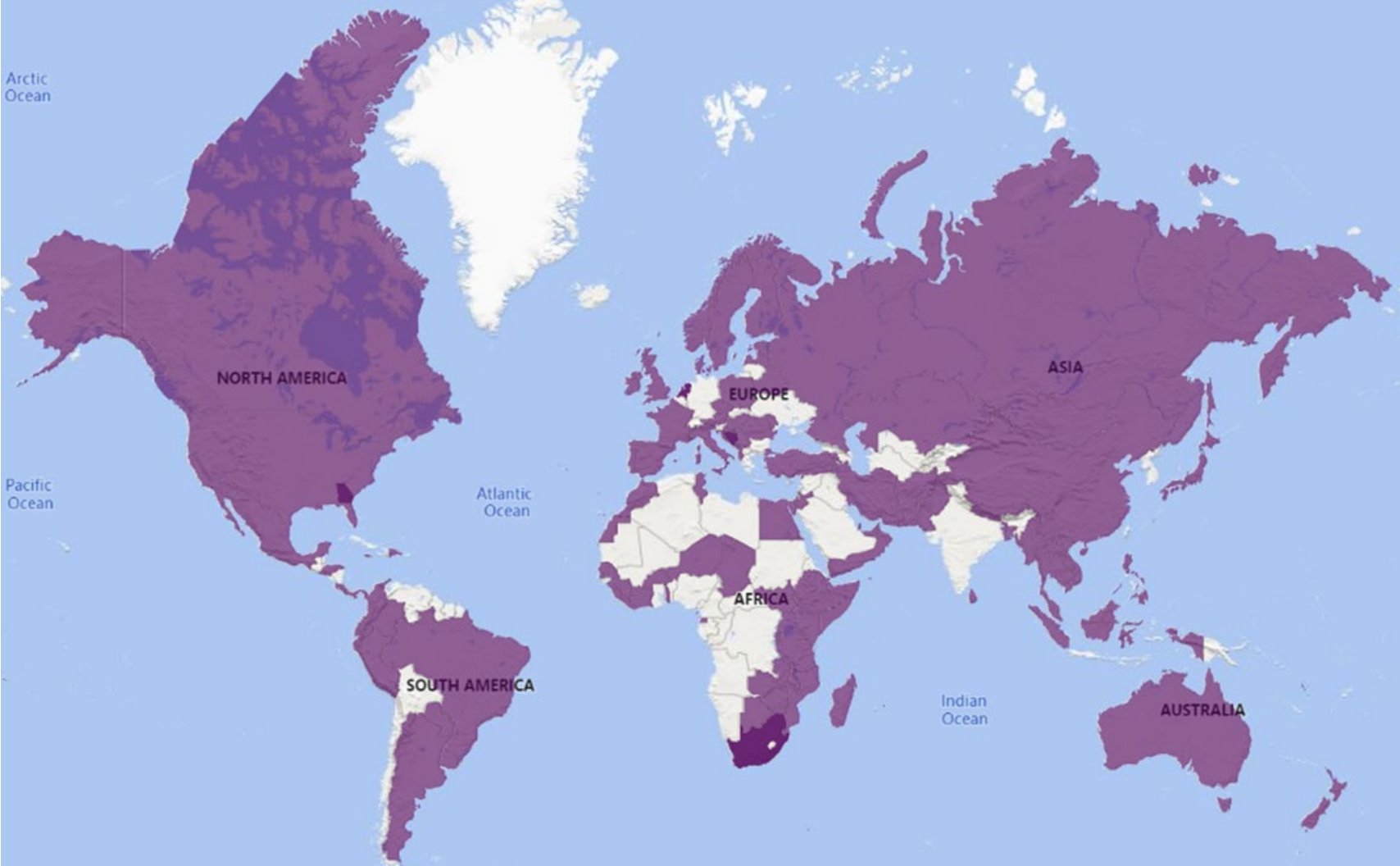
Cutoff	Person with disability has	n	% (weighted)
1	at least 1 domain is 'some difficulty'	13,705	43.4
2	at least 2 domains are 'some difficulty'	6,775	20.4
3	at least 1 domain is 'a lot of difficulty'	3,008	8.8
4	at least 1 domain is 'unable to do it'	459	1.3

Source: National Health Interview Survey, 2021, adults age 18+

# Advantages

- Functional approach consistent with WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) Model
- Identifies most people with disabilities
- Captures severity *and* domain-specific functioning
- Tested successfully in many countries (low, middle, and high income)
- Designed to be internationally comparable
- Can easily be added to existing censuses and surveys or to project-based data collections:
  - Approximately 1.25 minutes to administer
  - Wealth of implementation and analysis guidance

# Where in the World is the WG-SS?



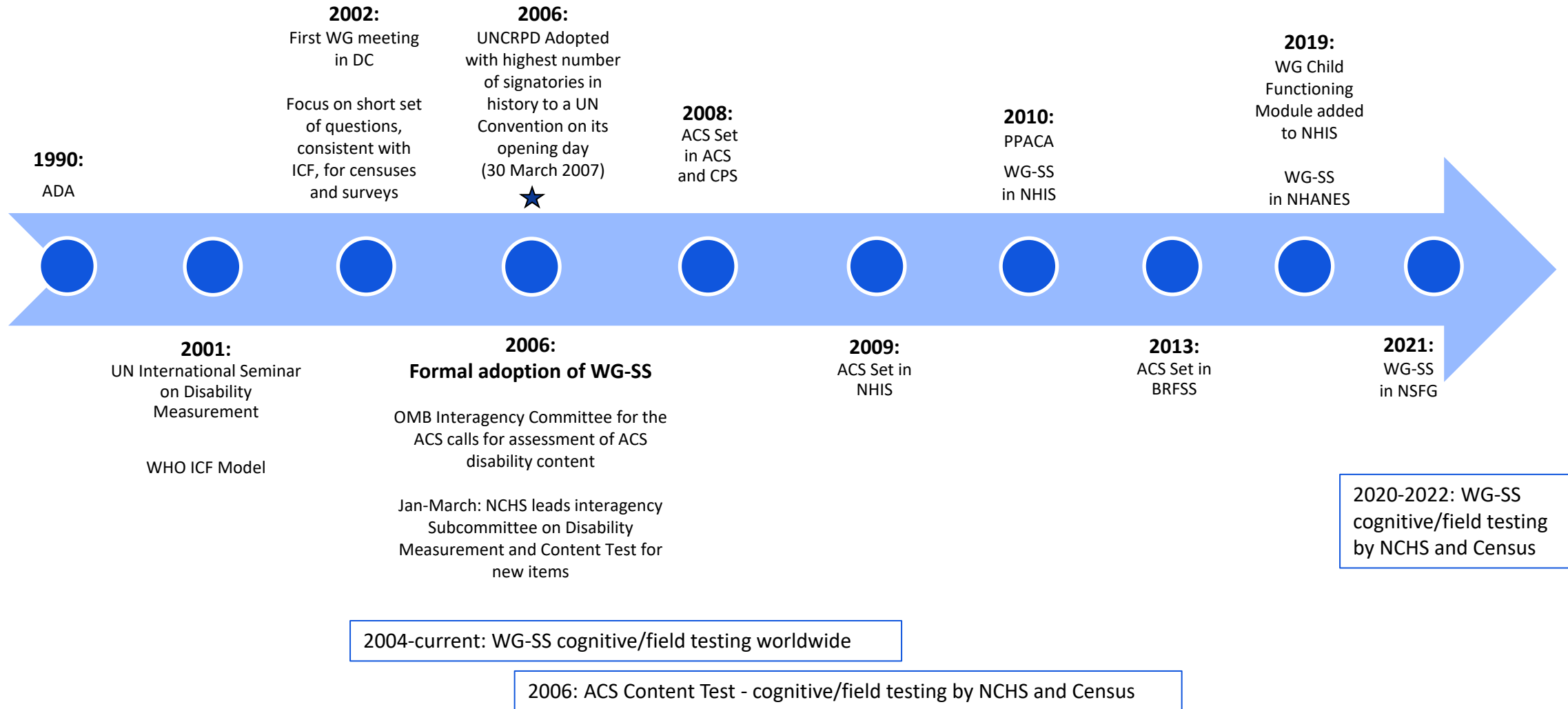
Source: Based on 2009-2023 reported use of the WG-SS in annual submission of WG Country Report forms (n=123)

# WG-SS Questions Adopted Widely

- Endorsed as the means for collecting disability data in the 2020 round of censuses – the UN Statistical Division and the UN Economic Commission for Europe.
- Used in censuses or surveys in over 123 countries to date.
- Promoted as the means to collect disability data in all programs and projects by international development and aid programs – USAID, FCDO (UK), DFAT (Australia), NORAD (Norway), MFA (Finland), GIZ (Germany).
- Adopted in all sponsored household surveys including the World Bank Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) and USAID Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)
- Adopted as the way to disaggregate data across a variety of global and regional initiatives, including the Incheon Strategy on Making the Right Real in Asia.
- Recommended as the means for disaggregating the SDGs by disability – UN DESA’s Disability Data Experts Group – and data collected in humanitarian and crises contexts.
- OPDs, NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies.
- Included in U.S. collections, including NHIS, NHANES, NSFG, Pulse, and more to come...

# Improving U.S. Census Disability Data: The ACS Set

# Selected Historical Moments and Disability Measurement Changes





# Census Disability Data Collections

**F** Answer questions 15 and 16 ONLY IF this person is 5 years old or over. Otherwise, SKIP to the questions for PERSON 2 on page 10.

**15** Does this person have any of the following long-lasting conditions:

a. Blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying?		
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16** Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6 months or more, does this person have any difficulty in doing any of the following activities:

a. Learning, remembering, or concentrating?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home?		
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**G** Answer question 17 ONLY IF this person is 15 years old or over. Otherwise, SKIP to the questions for PERSON 2 on page 10.

**17** Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition lasting 6 months or more, does this person have any difficulty in doing any of the following activities:

a. Going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office?	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Working at a job or business?		
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2000 Census  
1999-2007 ACS

**17** a. Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?

Yes  
 No

b. Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?

Yes  
 No

**G** Answer question 18a - c if this person is 5 years old or over. Otherwise, SKIP to the questions for Person 2 on page 12.

**18** a. Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?

Yes  
 No

b. Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?

Yes  
 No

c. Does this person have difficulty dressing or bathing?

Yes  
 No

**H** Answer question 19 if this person is 15 years old or over. Otherwise, SKIP to the questions for Person 2 on page 12.

**19** Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have difficulty doing errands alone such as visiting a doctor's office or shopping?

Yes  
 No

2020 Census  
2008-current ACS

# ACS Design Requirements for Disability Questions

Work was subject to several strict guidelines and requirements.

In particular, the revised questions:

- 6 questions which could not exceed the space limitations in the American Community Survey – constrained response set;
- must perform equally well across administration modes (mail, telephone, in-person);
- must be appropriate for the greatest proportion of individuals as possible, including young children;
- provide a valid, reliable and understandable general measure of disability; and
- would be fielded, without changes, for a 5-year period beginning with 2008 in order to generate 2010 Census estimates comparable in quality to the 2000 Census long form estimates.

# Measurement Objectives

- Based on the legislative review (18 agencies had legislative mandates and the conceptual framework):
  - “equalization of opportunity” was selected as the key policy question in areas such as housing, employment, communications, income and other areas of participation in society.
- Thus, the question set must identify persons who, because of their limitations in functioning, are *at risk* for discrimination or lack appropriate opportunity for participation.
- In addition, in order to meet legislative and programmatic requirements for services and other forms of support, a measure of severe disability identifying those in need of assistance to maintain *independence* should be included.

# Resources

For more information about the ACS set:

[Disability in the ACS](#)

[2007 Evaluation Report Covering Disability](#)

[Review of Changes in Disability Measurement in the 2008 ACS](#)

For more information about the WG:

[WG Website Homepage](#)

[The WG Primer](#)

[Disability Measurement & Monitoring Using the WG Questions](#)

For more information, contact CDC  
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)  
TTY: 1-888-232-6348 [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

