



Accessibility and the Impact of Disabilities on Architectural Licensure

June 2025

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Overview

In September 2023, NCARB and NOMA released an action plan to address disparities on the path to licensure, following several years of research through our joint [Baseline on Belonging](#) study. The action plan includes efforts to conduct additional research that will inform efforts to increase accessibility on the path to licensure. Since then, NCARB has conducted surveys digging deeper into topics like early licensure awareness, firm support for the experience program, and the impact of supervisors and mentors.

In February 2025, NCARB launched a survey exploring the impact that disabilities and chronic health conditions have on candidates pursuing the path to licensure. The survey results reveal significant disparities for candidates with disabilities, including:

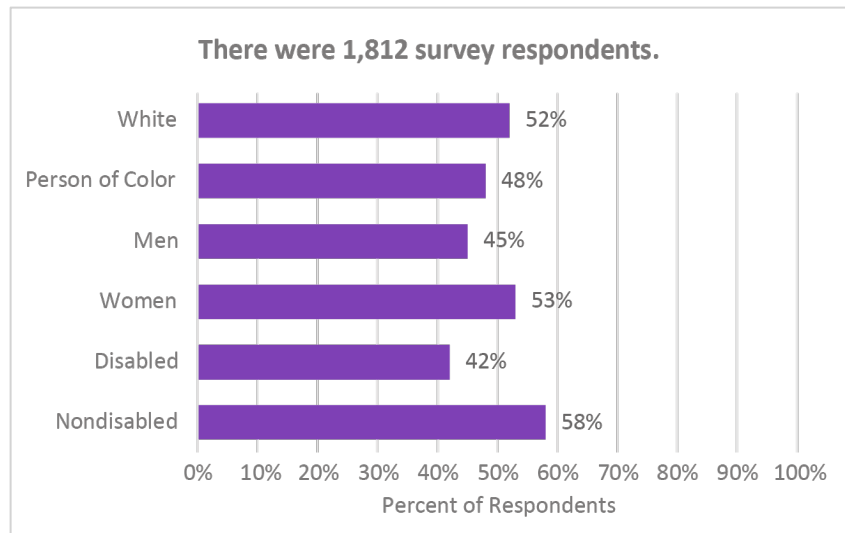
- **Respondents with disabilities reported more major barriers on the path to licensure than their peers.** Fifty percent of disabled respondents said they experienced major barriers on the path to licensure, compared to 41% of non-disabled respondents.
- **Respondents with disabilities were slightly more likely than their peers to face challenges navigating the Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®).** This includes challenges related to receiving mentorship from their supervisor and gaining access to experience in all areas of the AXP.
- **Respondents with disabilities were more likely than their peers to face challenges completing the Architect Registration Examination® (ARE®).** This includes challenges related to staying focused while testing, caring for their physical needs while testing, and applying for and receiving exam accommodations.

SURVEY STRUCTURE

The survey included questions about respondents' overall experiences and barriers on the path to licensure, as well as respondent demographic information. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements regarding various circumstances related to their education, experience, and examination.

RESPONDENTS

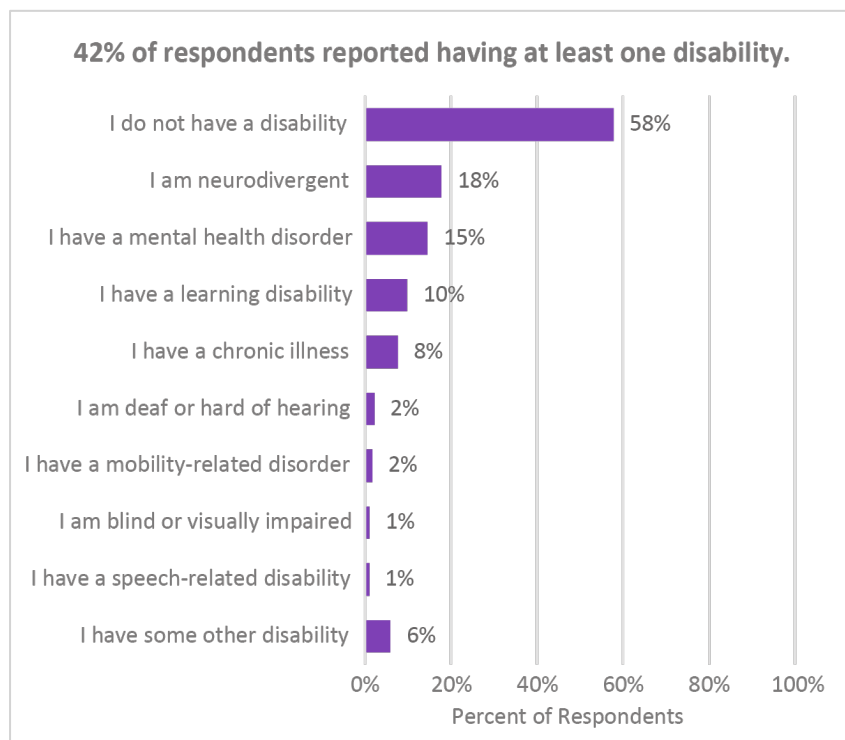
The survey was shared with active licensure candidates, architects licensed within the last three years, and individuals who stopped pursuing licensure within the last three years. There were 1,812 total survey respondents, with strong representation across many demographic groups. Just over half of respondents (52%) identified as white, with another 48% identifying as a race or ethnicity other than white.



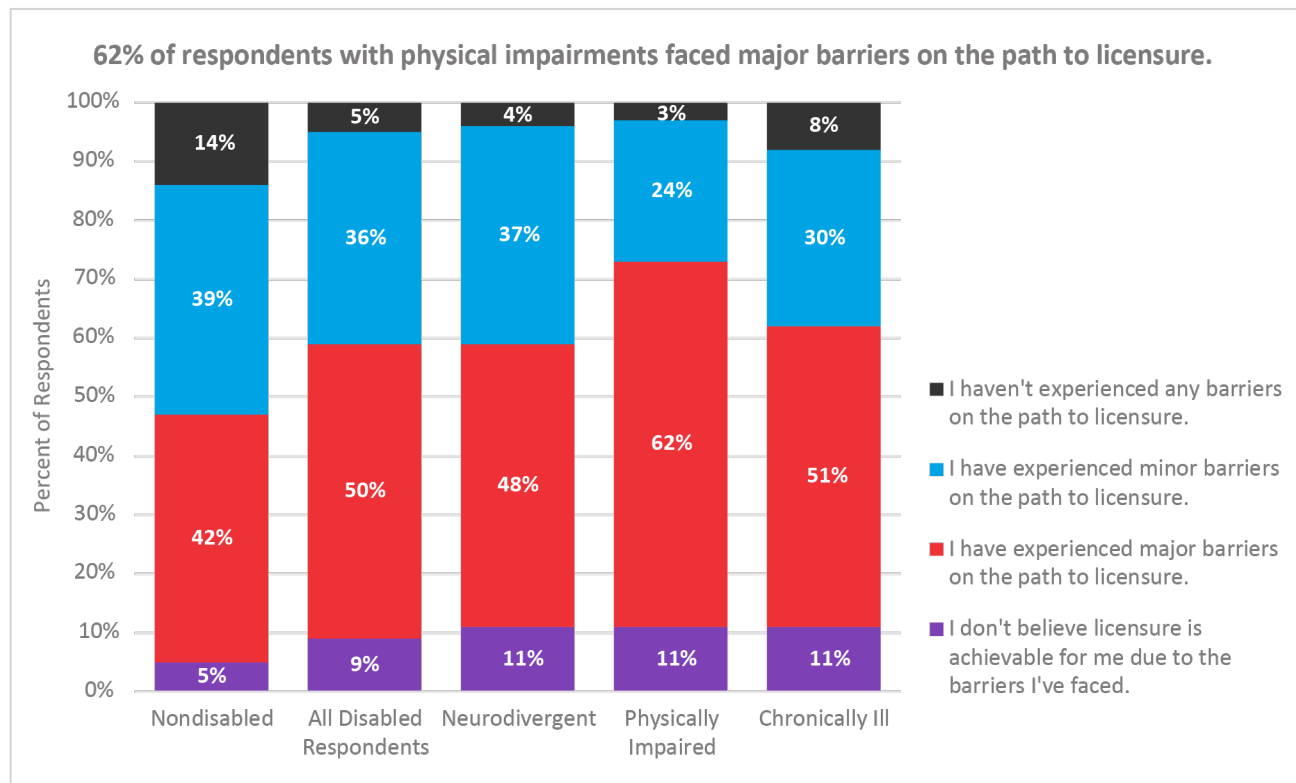
Women made up a slight majority (53%) of survey respondents, and men made up 45%. Note: Approximately 1.5% of survey respondents identified as nonbinary, which is below NCARB's threshold for minimum sample size (30 individuals).

More than 40% of respondents indicated they had a disability, disorder, or chronic illness. The disabilities most commonly reported by survey participants included mental health disorders, neurodivergence, and learning disabilities. While each respondent's circumstances and diagnoses are unique, disabilities have been grouped into the following categories to ensure a valid sample size and statistical significance:

- **Neurodivergent:** Includes those who selected neurodivergent, as well as those who indicated a disorder typically included under the umbrella of neurodivergence, such as mental health disorders, speech-related disabilities, and learning/cognitive disabilities
- **Physically Impaired:** Includes those who indicated they have a mobility-related, hearing-related, or vision-related disability
- **Chronically Ill:** Includes those who indicated they have a chronic illness



Barriers to Licensure



Overall, 62% of respondents with disabilities indicated that their condition had directly or indirectly interfered with their ability to complete the requirements for licensure.

To better understand impediments on the path to licensure, unlicensed respondents were asked to select a statement that best represented their experiences regarding barriers on the path to licensure. Compared to those without disabilities, respondents with disabilities were 5 percentage points more likely to say that they no longer believed licensure was achievable. Additionally, **50% of respondents with disabilities said they encountered major barriers on the path to licensure, compared to 42% of nondisabled respondents.**

Broken down further by disability type, respondents with physical impairments were the most likely to indicate they faced major barriers on the path to licensure. **Intersectionality also played a**

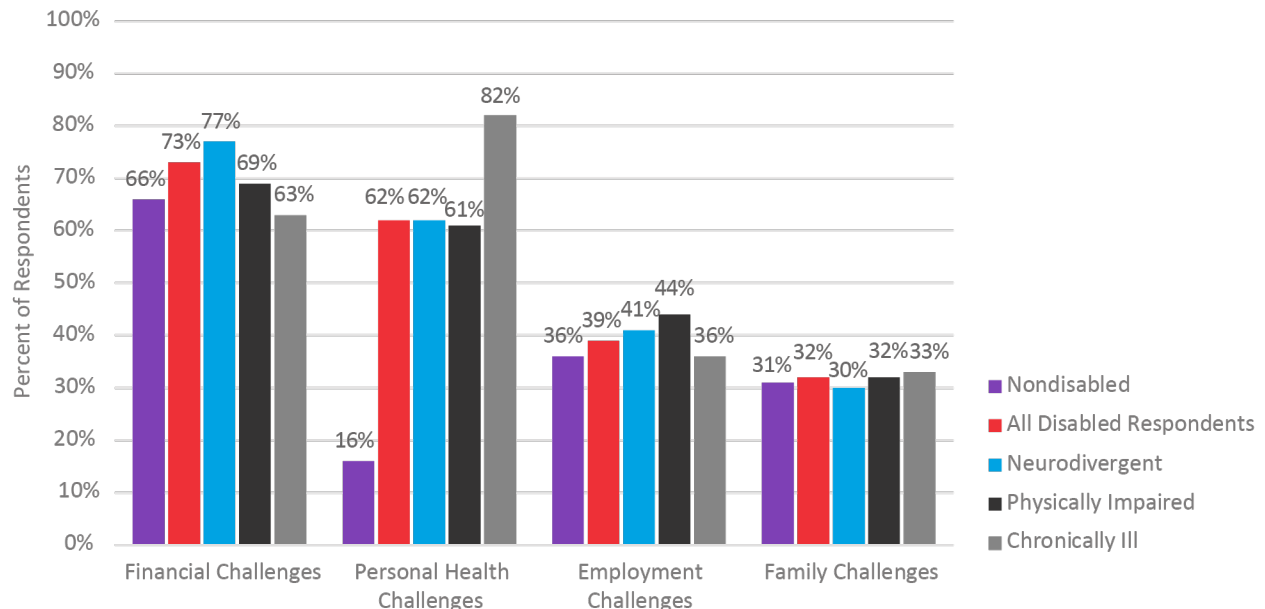
"I am constantly facing a double burden of proving my competence—both as a Black architect and as someone with an invisible disability."

—Black respondent with a disability

significant role: 58% of respondents with disabilities who were also from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups reported facing major barriers on the path to licensure, compared to 45% of white respondents with disabilities.

Nondisabled respondents were more likely to indicate they hadn't experienced any barriers on the path to licensure—14% of respondents without a disability compared to 5% of respondents with a disability.

82% of respondents with chronic illness indicated their licensure progress was impacted by their personal health.



Respondents were asked to indicate the types of challenges they had faced on the path to licensure. In general, financial challenges, employment challenges, and family challenges were the most commonly reported barriers. **However, respondents with disabilities were more than three times as likely as their nondisabled peers to select personal health challenges in addition to other common barriers.** This was especially true for respondents with chronic illnesses: more than 82% of chronically ill respondents indicated their licensure progress was impacted by their personal health.

“My current firm is extremely accepting and accommodating, but finding a job in the architecture industry was almost impossible.”

—Respondent with multiple disabilities

A high number of all respondents (68%) reported facing financial challenges that impacted their path to licensure. Neurodivergent respondents were even more likely to report facing financial challenges at 77%, and respondents with physical impairments were most likely to report facing employment challenges (44%).

Additional types of challenges not shown in the chart above include social/cultural challenges, language challenges, and immigration challenges—each of these was selected by less than a quarter of total survey respondents.

Respondents with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to indicate they faced almost all types of challenges, with the exception of language and immigration challenges.

Education

The survey's education section included questions about respondents' educational background, ability to navigate the demands of their architecture program, and the resources and support available from their architecture program.

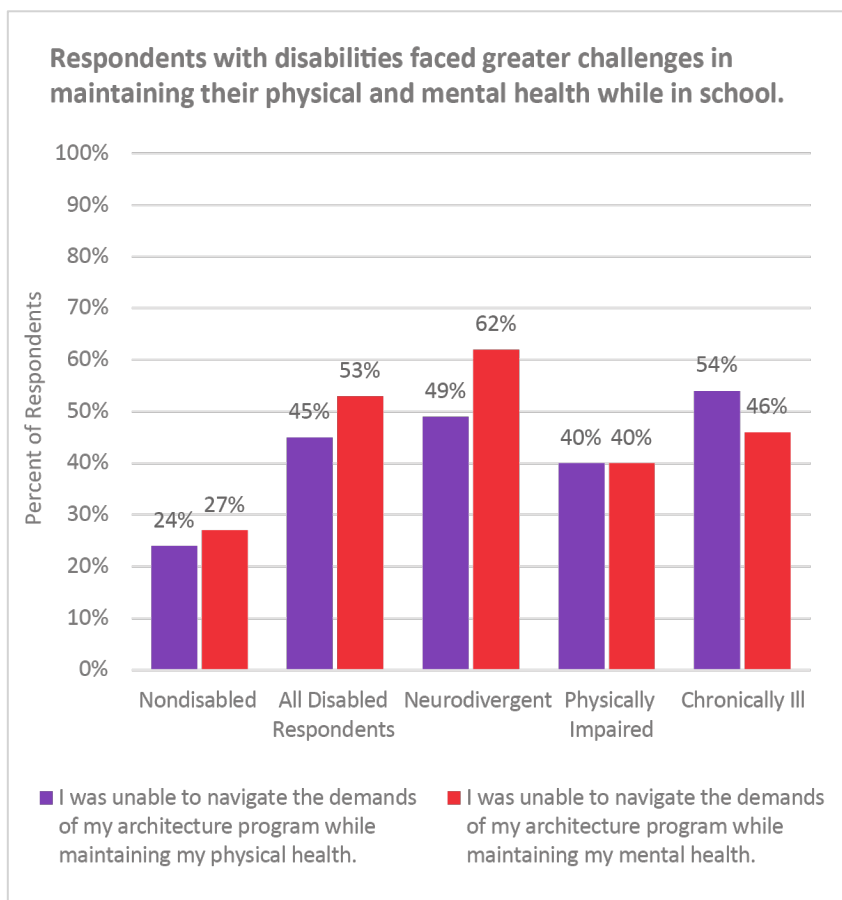
The majority of respondents (71%) indicated they held a degree from an architecture program accredited by the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), with the most common alternatives including holding a four-year degree in architecture (11%) and holding a degree in architecture from an international institution (9%). Respondents with disabilities were significantly more likely than those without a disability to hold a degree from a NAAB-accredited program (80% and 65%, respectively), with nondisabled respondents including a larger proportion of international applicants.

When asked if they were able to navigate the demands of their architecture program while maintaining their physical health, 33% of all respondents indicated that they could not.

Respondents with disabilities—especially those with chronic illnesses—were much more likely than nondisabled respondents to report that they were not able to navigate the demands of their architecture program while caring for their physical health (shown in purple on the chart, below).

Similarly, 39% of all respondents indicated they were unable to navigate the demands of their architecture program while maintaining their *mental* health. **Respondents with disabilities—especially neurodivergent respondents—were much more likely than nondisabled respondents to report that they were not able to navigate the demands of their program while caring for their mental health** (shown in red on the chart, right).

When it came to psychological safety, respondents with disabilities were more likely than nondisabled respondents to indicate that their architecture program did not take steps to protect students' psychological safety (56% and 40%, respectively).



Respondents with disabilities were also more likely than nondisabled respondents to indicate they didn't have access to the tools they needed to succeed in architecture school, including both material resources and support systems.

The disparity in resources between disabled and nondisabled respondents was smaller when considering material resources, such as textbooks and studio supplies (shown in purple on the chart, right). When asked if they had access to the material resources they needed to succeed in architecture school, 20% of all respondents indicated that they did not. **Respondents with disabilities were slightly more likely than nondisabled**

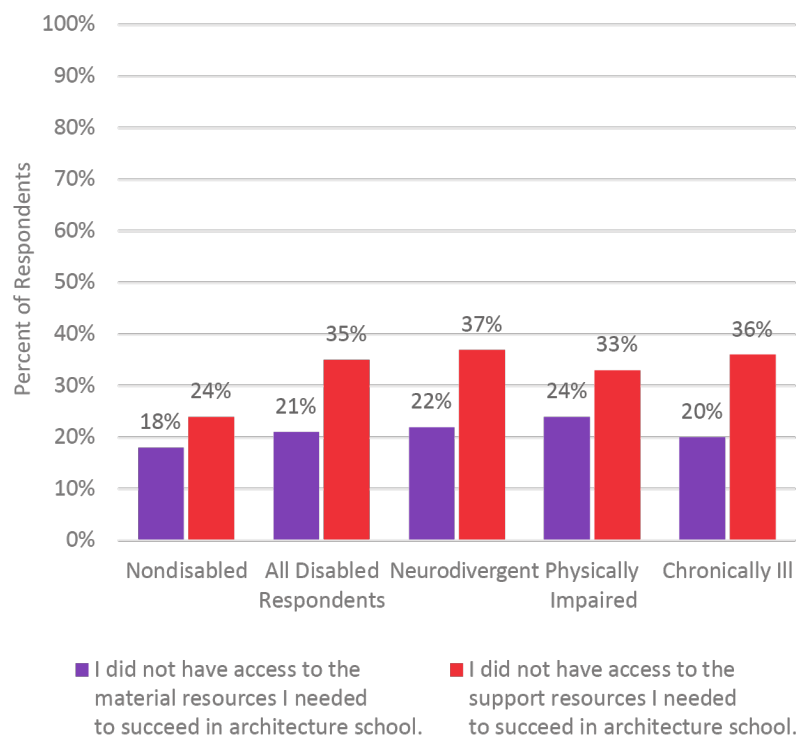
respondents to say they did not have access to the material resources they needed, especially disabled respondents with a physical impairment.

By contrast, the disparity regarding support systems was much more significant (shown in red on the chart, above). When asked if they had access to the support systems (such as guidance counselors or mental health resources) they needed to succeed in architecture school, 29% of all respondents indicated they did not. Respondents with disabilities were 11 percentage points more likely than nondisabled respondents to indicate they lacked access to necessary support systems.

"Reading consumed a lot of my time in college. I would read a lot and not really capture the main idea. Unless I start creating diagrams I would forget and keep reading and not retain information."

—Respondent with a learning disability

Respondents with disabilities were less likely to have access to the tools they needed to succeed in architecture school.



When asked if their program provided support for students with disabilities or chronic conditions, 32% of disabled respondents said no. And even when a program *did* provide support for students with disabilities, most disabled respondents indicated they did not take advantage of the resources offered. However, of those who did take advantage of resources for disabled students, 76% reported that the support received was impactful in making their education more accessible.

Experience

In the survey's experience section, respondents were asked about their relationship with their supervisor, their treatment in the workplace, and their ability to gain experience in all areas of the Architectural Experience Program® (AXP®). In addition, respondents with disabilities were asked several questions about access to accommodations in the workplace.

NAVIGATING THE AXP

The majority of respondents (96%) had made some progress toward completing the AXP. Overall, **respondents with disabilities were slightly more likely than their peers to face challenges navigating the AXP.** This includes challenges related to receiving mentorship from their supervisor and gaining access to experience in all areas of the AXP.

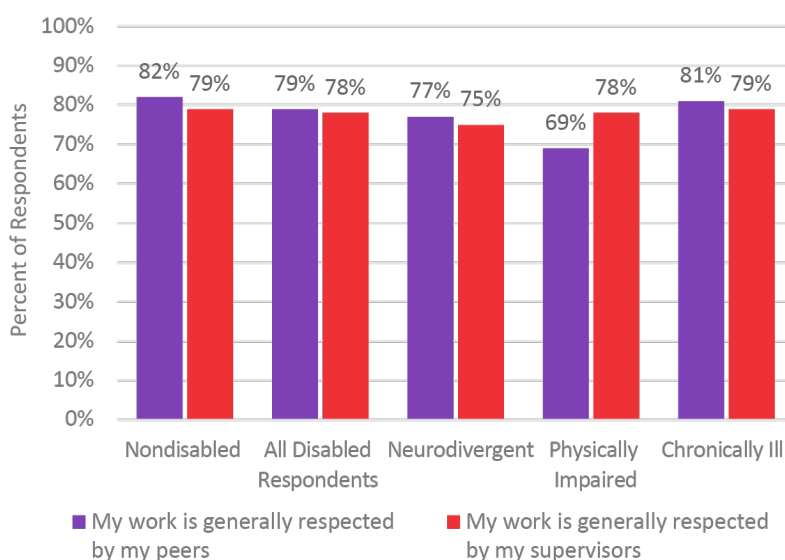
Respondents were asked to indicate if their work was generally respected by their peers, as well as if their work was generally respected by their supervisors. Disabled and

nondisabled respondents were nearly equally as likely to indicate that their work was respected by both their peers and their supervisors, with one significant outlier: **Respondents with a physical impairment were 13 percentage points less likely than nondisabled respondents to agree that their work was respected by their peers** (shown in purple on the chart, above). However, they were only 2 percentage points less likely to agree that their work was respected by their supervisors

"I have mobility issues, and as such, field visits are a struggle. I run out of steam faster than my coworkers, and [they] feel like bringing me is a waste of valuable time."

—Respondent with a physical impairment

Respondents with physical impairments are less likely to feel their work is respected by their peers.



(shown in red on the chart). Similarly, respondents with physical impairments were significantly less likely than nondisabled respondents to indicate they are treated similarly to their peers in the workplace: 64% of nondisabled respondents agreed compared to 43% of respondents with a physical impairment.

While respondents with physical impairments were more likely to report challenges related to their treatment in the workplace, respondents who were neurodivergent were more likely to report challenges related to their supervisor relationship. When asked about their relationship with their AXP supervisor, 61% of all respondents indicated their supervisor provides them with constructive criticism and professional development.

Filtered by disability status, respondents with disabilities were 4 percentage points less likely to agree than those without (60% and 64%, respectively).

Neurodivergent respondents were even less likely to agree that their supervisor provided constructive criticism and professional development at 58% (shown in purple on the chart, right). When asked if they were able to gain access to experience in all areas of the AXP, 61% of respondents indicated they were—including 69% of nondisabled respondents and 62% of respondents with disabilities. **Again,**

neurodivergent respondents were even less likely to agree, with only 60% indicating they were able to gain experience in all areas of the AXP (shown in red on the chart, above).

When asked if they had access to the resources necessary to succeed in their role at their firm, just over half (55%) of all respondents agreed. However, respondents with disabilities were 10 percentage points less likely than their nondisabled peers to agree (50% and 60%, respectively), and respondents with a physical impairment were even less likely to agree at just 37%.

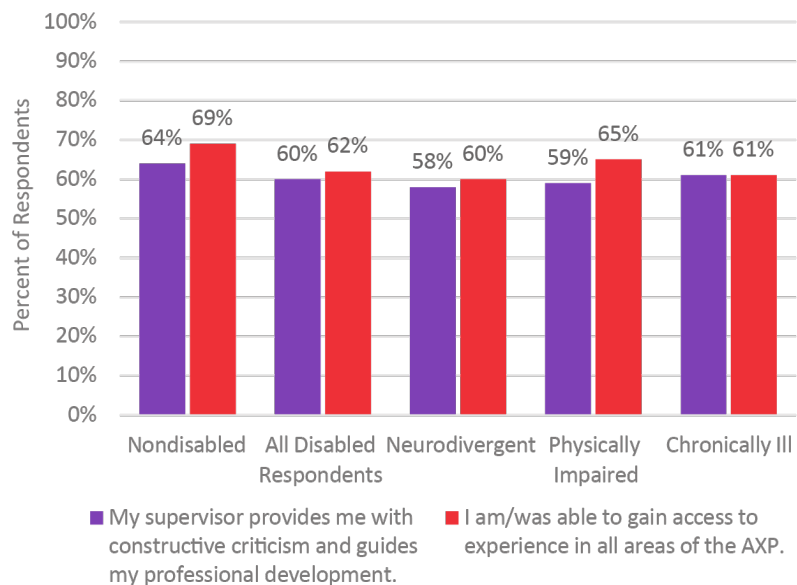
ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

When asked about disclosing their disability to others, only 25% of respondents with disabilities indicated they felt safe being open about their disability in the workplace. This number was highest for disabled respondents with a physical impairment (34%) and lowest with disabled respondents who were neurodivergent (20%). Additionally, only 22% of respondents with disabilities reported that they had (or had previously had) accommodations in the workplace for their condition.

"Most interviews I was hung up on as soon as I ask about accommodations. I am legally blind and a wheelchair user. I need a certain level of accessibility in the workplace."

—Respondent with physical impairments

Neurodivergent respondents are more likely to report challenges related to their supervisor relationship.



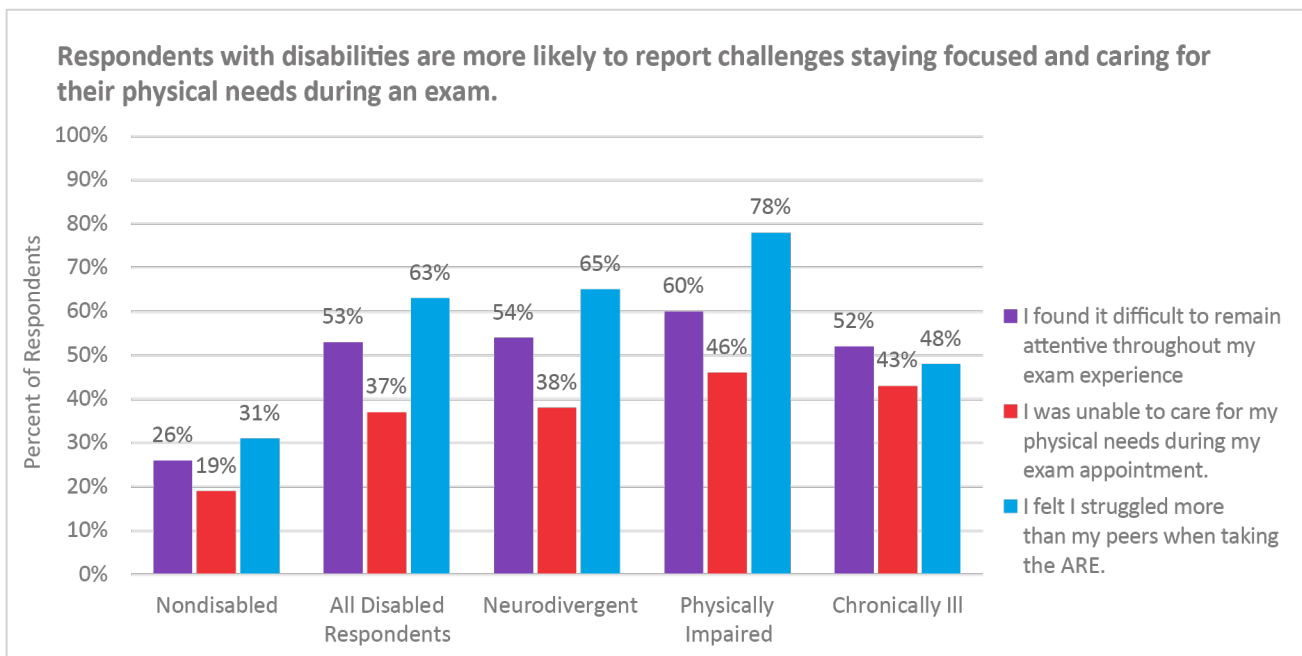
Of those who indicated they had an accommodation, 72% reported that their firm was supportive of their request. Of those who indicated they did not have an accommodation, 41% said they would be interested in requesting an accommodation if they felt safer being open about their disability in the workplace.

Examination

In the exam section of the survey, respondents were asked about their experience taking the ARE, including general exam-related questions as well as questions about taking online proctored exams and navigating the exam accommodations application process. Just over 60% of all respondents had taken some or all of the ARE.

Respondents with disabilities were more likely than their peers to face challenges completing the ARE. This includes challenges related to staying focused while testing, caring for their physical needs while testing, and applying for and receiving exam accommodations.

GENERAL EXAM EXPERIENCE



Thirty-nine percent of respondents indicated they found it difficult to remain attentive throughout their exam appointment—including 26% of nondisabled respondents and 53% of respondents with disabilities (shown in purple on the chart, above). Respondents with physical impairments were even more likely to indicate difficulty remaining attentive at 60%—a 34 percentage point gap.

Additionally, 27% of all respondents reported that they were unable to care for their physical needs during their exam appointment (shown in red on the chart above). Filtered by disability status, this includes just 19% of nondisabled respondents and 37% of respondents with disabilities.

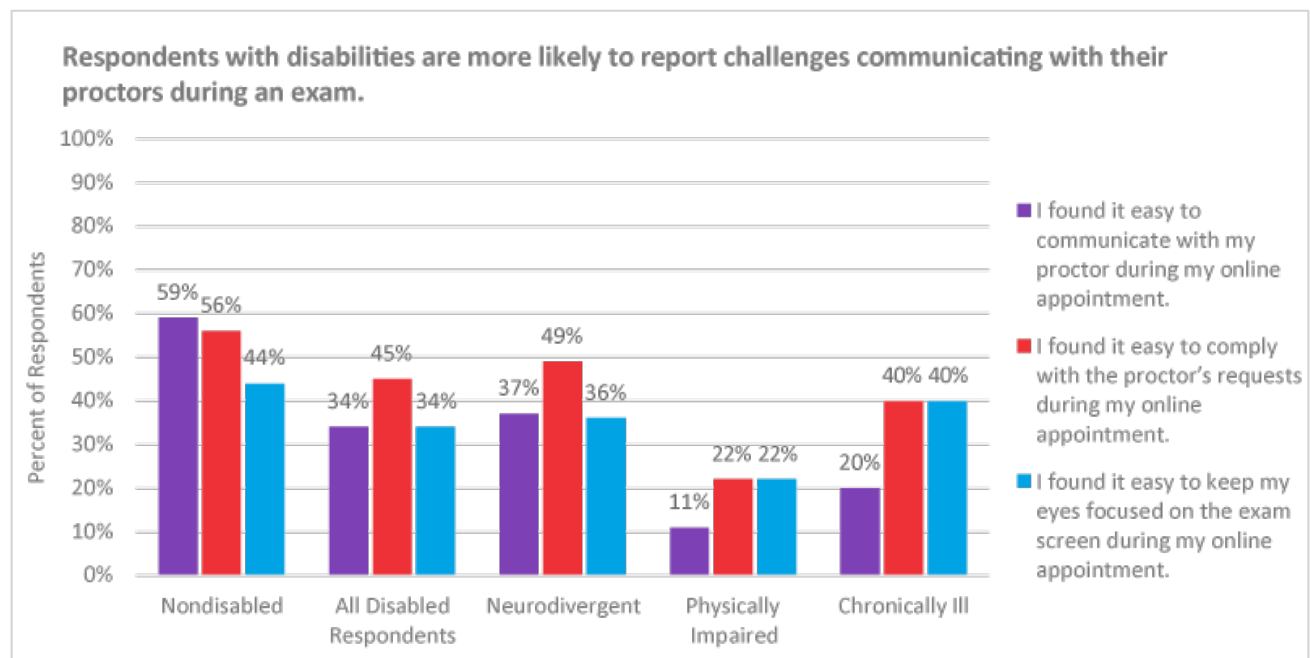
“I am a Type 1 diabetic on an insulin pump. Modern insulin pumps are run from a smartphone with constant monitoring of blood glucose levels. Many new/modern insulin pumps are ONLY controlled from the smartphone. This becomes difficult when taking an exam that is monitored for numerous hours without access to be able to monitor and control the insulin pump.”

—Respondent with a chronic illness

Again, respondents with physical impairments were more likely to report challenges caring for their physical needs: 46% said they were unable to care for their physical needs during their exam appointment.

When asked if they felt they struggled more than their peers when taking the ARE (shown in blue on the chart on the previous page), respondents with disabilities were twice as likely to agree compared to their nondisabled peers (63% and 31%, respectively). More than three-quarters of respondents with a physical impairment said they felt they struggled more than their peers when testing.

ONLINE PROCTORING



Twenty-four percent of all survey respondents had taken at least one division of the exam via online proctoring—a statistic which roughly aligns with NCARB's overall online proctoring usage.

Respondents with disabilities were 2 percentage points more likely than nondisabled respondents to take an online-proctored exam.

Respondents with disabilities were more likely than nondisabled respondents to report challenges communicating with their proctor, complying with their proctor's requests, and keeping their eyes focused on their screen during their online appointment. This was especially true for respondents with physical impairments, who were the least likely to agree across each of these questions. For example, 59% of nondisabled respondents said it was easy to communicate with their proctor during their online appointment, compared to just 11% of respondents with a physical impairment.

EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS

NCARB offers exam Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations for candidates with disabilities and chronic health conditions, as well as for candidates who are pregnant or nursing. However, only 16% of respondents with disabilities indicated they had used NCARB's exam accommodations.

Survey findings from those respondents who had used NCARB's exam accommodations highlighted challenges navigating the application process and scheduling exam appointments: Of disabled respondents who used exam accommodations, only 41% said the accommodations they received met their physical or mental needs, and 39% said the process of applying for accommodations was not straightforward or easy to understand. Additionally, 47% of respondents with disabilities who had used exam accommodations reported that the process of scheduling an appointment with accommodations was not straightforward or easy to understand.

"The scheduling process for ARE exams with accommodation[s] is a major pain and feels like it takes far longer than necessary."

—Respondent with disabilities

Next Steps

Overall, findings from this survey revealed a variety of significant challenges faced by candidates with disabilities on the path to licensure. While some of these challenges (such as the exam accommodations process) are within NCARB's control, others (such as peer respect and treatment in the workplace) are not.

NCARB is in the middle of a multi-year effort to re-envision the process of becoming an architect, with a goal of ensuring that the path to licensure is more accessible for candidates of all backgrounds. Over the next several years, our expert volunteers—including architects from across the United States—will explore how best to measure and assess competency on the path to licensure, including opportunities to create additional pathways that might allow candidates to navigate around specific programmatic challenges. The findings from this survey will help inform their work.

In addition, NCARB will continue to work with our exam delivery vendors to streamline the accommodations process for exam candidates.