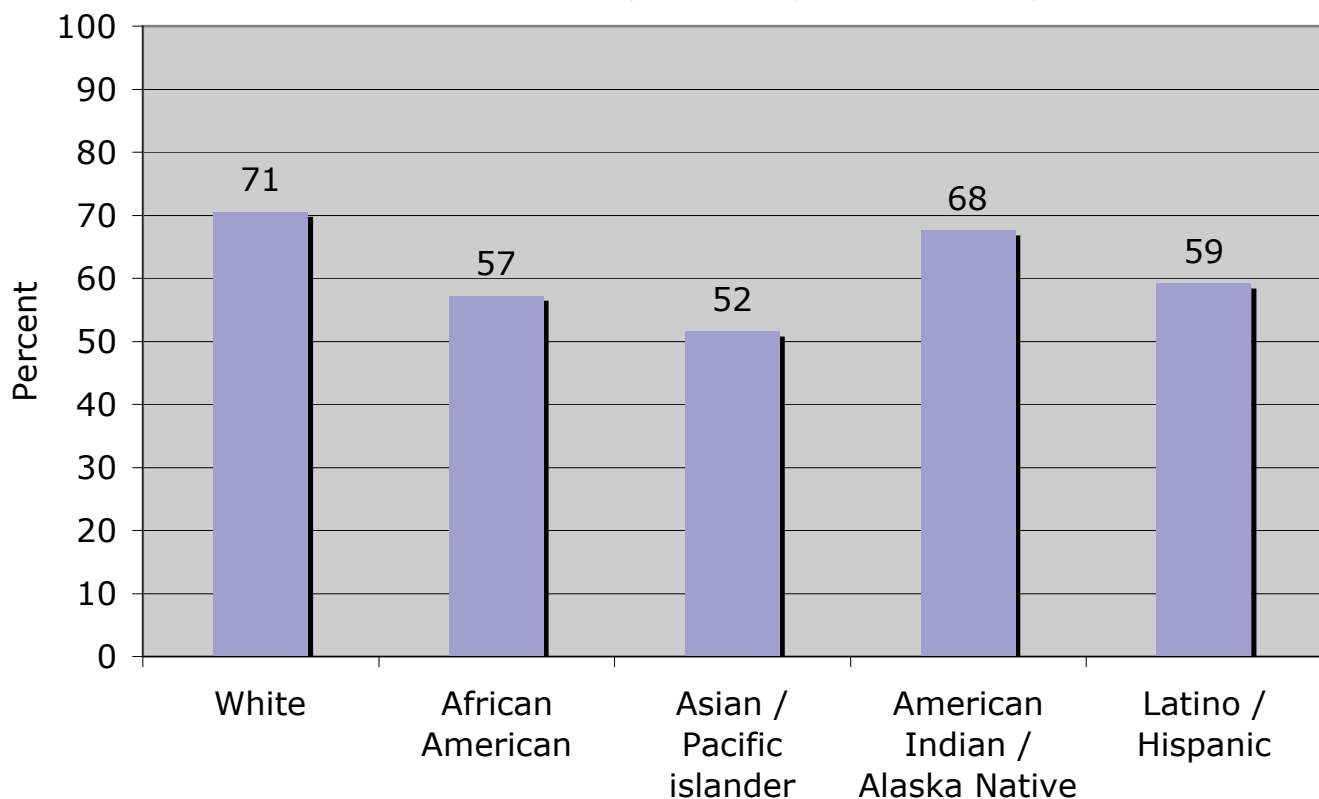


One of the goals of this project is to examine assistive technology (AT) usage among underserved populations, including examining how consumers' AT experiences differ based on race and ethnicity. We were interested in determining whether there were any assistive technology disparities for these populations. This brief will highlight some of the gaps observed in the data and suggest action strategies to address them.

What are the differences in AT usage by ethnicity?

A majority of survey respondents reported using some form of AT, but when we look at the racial and ethnic background of our respondents, we see that compared to whites (71%), usage rates are lower among African Americans (57%) and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (52%). (The sample size for American Indian/Alaska Natives was too small to analyze here.) Hispanics/Latinos (59%) also have lower rates.*

Assistive technology usage, by race/ethnicity



These disparities in usage may reflect a limited access to AT. This could possibly be due to language barriers or a limited awareness of assistive technology. Sometimes cultural views and values can play a role in determining whether devices will be used. For example, if a family

*See back cover for survey and demographic information.

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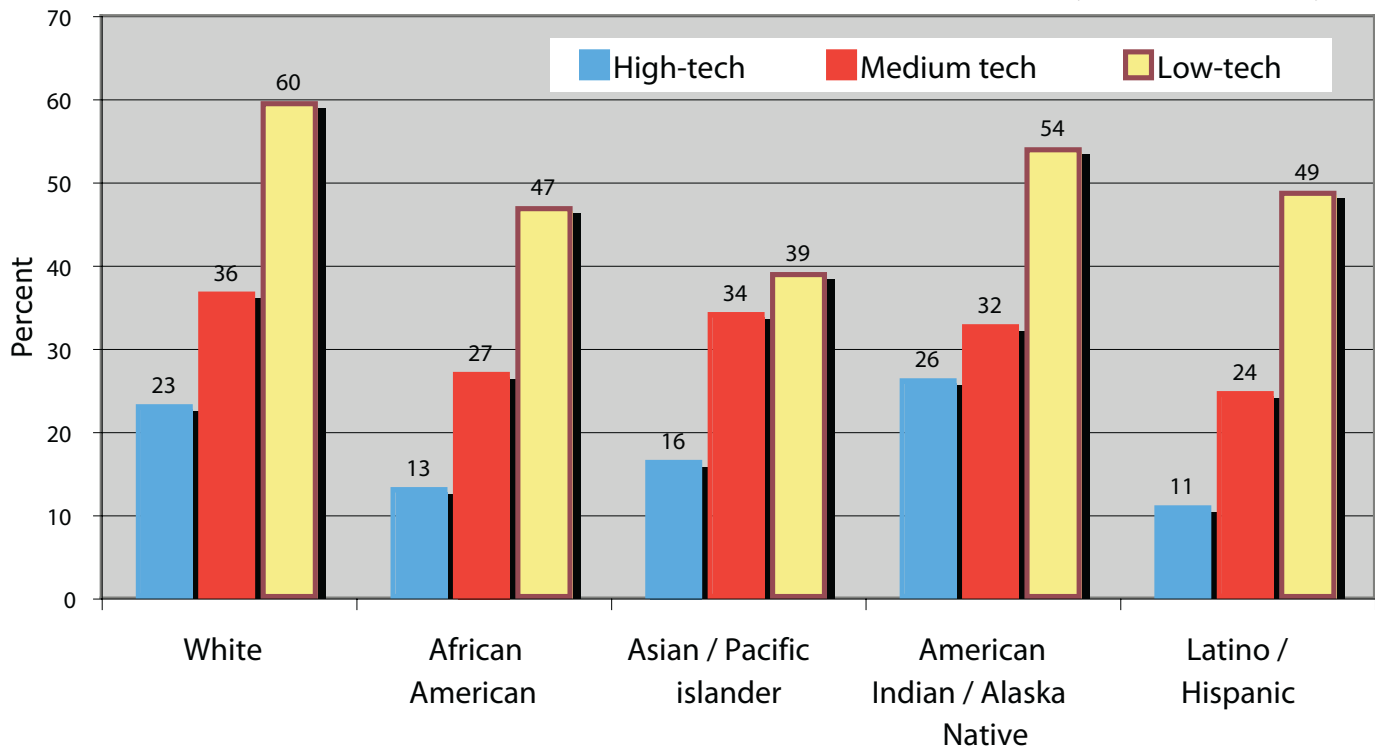
member with a disability is not seen as someone who needs to do a lot of interacting with the world, devices to help the consumer communicate or travel outside of the home

may not be seen as a need. This tells us race and ethnicity can be an important factor in the usage of AT by consumers.

What are the differences in types of technology used?

We divided the AT devices used by our consumers into 3 categories: high-, medium-, and low-tech. High-tech devices included computers, specialized hardware and software, communication and talking devices. Medium-tech devices included devices such as scooters/ electric wheelchairs, adapted vehicles, flashing/alerting devices and books on tape. Low-tech devices included more manual devices, such as manual wheelchairs, magnifiers, reachers/grabbers and canes/walkers/crutches.

Usage of high-, medium, and low-tech assistive devices, by race/ethnicity



When we compare these three categories across consumers' race and ethnicity, we find the type of devices used by consumers varies. For high-tech devices there is a large gap between whites and people of color. White consumers were more than twice as likely to use high-tech equipment as Latinos (23% versus 11%). The gap was also present for

African Americans (13%) and Asian Americans (16%). While at a less drastic level, this trend continues for the other device categories as well. Medium-tech devices were used at a high rate by whites (36%), compared to Asian American/Pacific Islanders (34%), African Americans (27%) and Latinos (24%). The gaps are smallest for usage of low-tech

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devices, with whites leading at 59%, followed by Latinos (49%), African Americans (47%), and Asian American/Pacific Islanders (39%).

These numbers show us the “digital divide” with regard to usage of computers and the Internet is also present for usage of assistive devices among people with disabilities. It suggests that consumers from different

racial and ethnic backgrounds do not have the same access to technology as their white counterparts. Past research has shown the rates of disability for Native Americans and African Americans are higher than those of whites. This makes the disparities in AT usage more disturbing.

Call to Action

One way to address these gaps and disparities is education. We need to educate people with disabilities among diverse racial and ethnic communities about the range of technologies and possibilities that are available to them. Perhaps people are not aware of the devices that can address the multitude of disabilities and needs. To create better access to AT-related information, it should be made available to consumers in a language and manner they can easily understand.

We also need to educate the providers. Service providers need to recognize the diverse cultural practices, views and values that shape the experiences of people with disabilities. Service providers need to develop innovative outreach strategies and venture into these diverse communities. We need to understand all of the varying factors and characteristics that determine the needs of people with disabilities from diverse backgrounds and the resources and opportunities available to them.

The Community Research for Assistive Technology Survey

During 2005, the Community Research for Assistive Technology (CR4AT) project of the California Foundation for Independent Living Centers (CFILC) launched a survey on assistive technology (AT) usage among the consumers of independent living centers throughout California. AT was defined broadly to include any device or equipment used to maintain or improve functioning, including devices used for mobility, seeing, hearing, communication, and performing everyday tasks.

A survey was mailed to 14,000 randomly selected consumers from 20 independent living centers, and 1,919 responses were received. Respondents were given a \$20 stipend for filling out the survey, which looked at demographics and socio-economic status, equipment usage and the impact it has on everyday life, barriers to getting equipment, and the benefits of AT usage in the workplace and in the community.

People with all types of disabilities responded to the survey, with 63% reporting mobility impairments, 29% reporting mental health disabilities, 24% cognitive or other developmental disabilities, 23% visual impairments, 20% hearing impairments, 14% health-related physical disabilities, and 13% speech impairments. A majority of respondents (55%) reported more than one type of disability. Most respondents (81%) were working-age adults, of whom only 20% were employed. Racial and ethnic minorities were well represented, with 17% of respondents identifying as Latino, 16% African American, 6% American Indian, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander.



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Improving Access Through Collaboration

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