

## **SUNspot – Adults with Disabilities and Wireless Service Plans**

**Volume 2013, Number 05 – July 2013**

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*We created “SUNspot” to share some of the latest findings from ongoing data collection for our Survey of User Needs (SUN), our cornerstone survey on use and usability of wireless technology by people with disabilities. We launched the first version of the SUN in 2001. The current version (Version 4) was launched in September 2012. The data reported here are preliminary results. Data collection is ongoing.*

This SUNspot addresses the questions related to choices of wireless service and preferences for particular service features. Two specific questions are addressed:

1. How do adults with disabilities choose a wireless service provider?
2. Do adults who are blind, deaf or have difficulty speaking, prefer specialized wireless service plans like voice-only, data-only, or text-only service?

Almost 1100 people have completed the SUN questionnaire to date, 861 of whom reported having one of the following difficulties:

- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Frequent worry, nervousness, or anxiety
- Difficulty seeing
- Difficulty hearing
- Difficulty speaking so people can understand you
- Difficulty using your arms
- Difficulty using your hands and fingers
- Difficulty walking or climbing stairs

### **Choosing wireless service providers**

When asked to pick from a short list of reasons for choosing their wireless service provider (see Table 1), 27% of respondents with disabilities chose “best price for the service”. Approximately even percentages of respondent said “best service options for me” (18%) and “best signal quality” (20%). Notably, “best customer support was cited by only 4% of respondents with disabilities.

Table 1 – Why did you choose your wireless service provider?

Difficulty	Best price for the service	Best service options for me	Best signal quality	Best customer support	Other
Cognitive	31%	14%	18%	5%	33%
Anxiety	32%	14%	21%	5%	29%
Seeing	26%	19%	18%	3%	33%
Hearing	27%	16%	16%	5%	36%
Speaking	24%	19%	16%	6%	35%
Using arms	27%	19%	29%	4%	23%
Using hands and fingers	24%	19%	25%	5%	27%
Walking, climbing stairs	29%	17%	24%	3%	27%
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>31%</b>

Looking at the data by disability type shows a few notable differences in response rates to each of the options presented. Price was identified as the reason for choosing wireless providers most frequently by respondents with cognitive or emotional (anxiety) limitation. Conversely, these respondents chose “best service options for me” least frequently, compared to respondents with other disabilities. These respondents probably do not need specialized service options for their disability, and instead favor low cost of service.

“Best signal quality” was identified as the reason for choosing service providers by substantially higher percentages of people with physical disabilities (difficulty using arms, hands and fingers; and difficulty walking, standing or climbing stairs) than by respondents with the other disability types. These physical disabilities often occur together. So it is not surprising that response rates are similar.

The relatively high rates of respondents across all disabilities (31%) who selected “other” as the reason for choosing their wireless service provider, requires a closer look at specific reasons offered. The most common response offered was that for various reasons respondents did not make the decision on carrier. Two major subsets of this response were that: 1) the phone and service were a gift or otherwise chosen by a family member or friend, or 2) that the respondent is on a family plan and therefore could not choose a different carrier. Others said that they had devices and service provided by employers (or received an employee discount). Still others said that they had government-subsidized devices and did not have a choice of carrier.

Another common reason for choosing carriers was simply either inertia or general satisfaction with existing carrier. Typical are comments like these: “I have always had them”, and “Have had them forever.” Also, “I’ve been with them for 12 years. They were the only ones available in my area back then.”

Other reasons include choosing a carrier because it was the only one offering the iPhone at the time. Additionally, a number of deaf respondents also chose their carriers because they consider them “deaf friendly”, e.g., offering plans, discounts or support for deaf users. Several respondents specifically mentioned the ability to use voice and data/text simultaneously for use with relay services as a reason for choosing their provider.

### **Specialized plans for blind, deaf and speech impaired users**

Respondents were asked separately if they had a preference for any of three types of specialized plans that presumably might be better tailored to their specific abilities. These included voice-only, text-only and data-only service plans (Table 2).

Table 2 – Would you be interested in any of the following types of wireless service plans?

	<b>Voice only</b>	<b>Text only</b>	<b>Data only</b>	<b>None of these options</b>
Blind	16%	2%	9%	73%
Deaf	0%	24%	12%	64%
Difficulty speaking	8%	15%	5%	73%

The response data in Table 2 show that more than a quarter (27%) of respondents who are blind or have difficulty speaking would be interested in a specialized voice-only, text-only, or data-only plan. For deaf respondents the figure is even higher, with more than one-third (36%) of respondents indicating interest in either a text-only or data-only plan.

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**Data source:** Survey of User Needs (SUN), Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Wireless Technologies (Wireless RERC). We share survey data with manufacturers and carriers, as well as with policymakers, for the purpose of improving usability of wireless technology. SUN data are regularly used in guiding industry and government initiatives. We invite the public to take the Survey of User Needs and share how wireless technology affects daily life, and how it could be improved. The survey is available on paper, by phone (404-367-1348), or online at: [https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SUN\\_2012-2013](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SUN_2012-2013).

The data presented here are based on a non-random sample. The survey is promoted as broadly as possible through convenience sampling techniques, with special effort toward reaching under-represented groups.

**Acknowledgement:** The Wireless RERC is sponsored by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) of the U.S. Department of Education under grant number H133E110002. The opinions contained in this paper are those of the Wireless RERC and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education or NIDRR.