

Fact Sheet

Employment Experiences Among Adults with Spinal Cord Injury.

Why Employment After SCI Matters

- ✓ There are over 300 new spinal cord injuries (SCI) each year in South Carolina.¹ This fact sheet presents employment insights from 1,421 individuals with SCI who have volunteered to participate in our study.
- ✓ Employment supports independence, improves quality of life, and contributes to both financial stability and emotional well-being.
- ✓ Most adults with SCI in South Carolina are not working.
- ✓ Returning to work is possible for many people with SCI, especially within the first two years post-injury, but success depends on the right support and removing barriers.

Employment Before Injury

Most people had work experience before their injury



- ✓ Employment support is important, as many people with SCI have valuable job experience.

What Jobs Did People Have Before Injury?

Out of 973 individuals who shared their most recent job before injury



5 in 10 (50%) worked in physical labor or trades



About 2 in 10 (18%) worked in sales, service, or retail



Over 1 in 10 (14%) worked in professional, technical, or scientific fields



About 2 in 10 (19%) worked in healthcare, education, office, or other jobs combined.

Demographic Overview

Data are based on 1,421 individuals with SCI in our longitudinal study.

Sex Distribution



About 7 out of every 10 SCI individuals were males and 3 out of 10 were females.

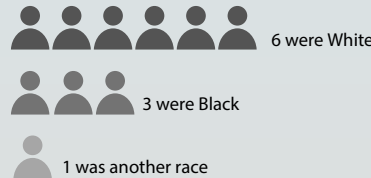
Age

On average, SCI individuals were about

51 years old

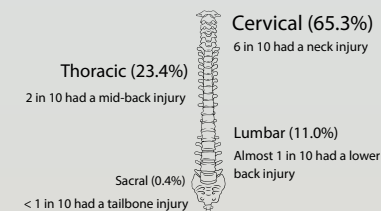
Race

Out of every 10 people who reported their race:



Injury Level

Out of the 1,301 individuals with SCI who provided information, we found:



Time Since Injury

The average time since injury was

5 years

Mobility Status

7 in 10 SCI individuals are able walk

3 in 10 SCI individuals are not able walk

Learning Leads to Earning

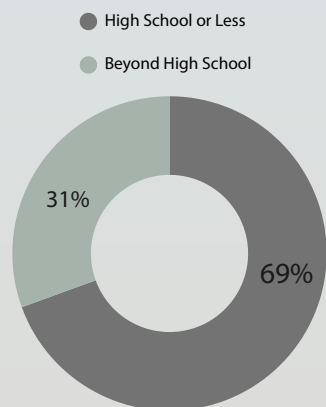


Higher education is strongly linked to gainful employment after SCI.²

Most people went to school for about

12 years

Figure 1. Educational Attainment



Most participants (7 in 10) had a high school education or less. Only 3 in 10 had completed education beyond high school.

References

- 1 Selassie A. Year 1 Technical Progress Report: South Carolina Spinal Cord Injury Surveillance and Registry System. Traumatic Spinal Cord Injury Surveillance & Follow-up Registry, Medical University of South Carolina.
- 2 Krause JS, Dismuke-Greer CE, Reed K, Backus D, Rumrill P. Gainful employment and earnings among those with spinal cord injury and multiple sclerosis. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. 2019;52(1):19-28. doi:10.3233/JVR-191057

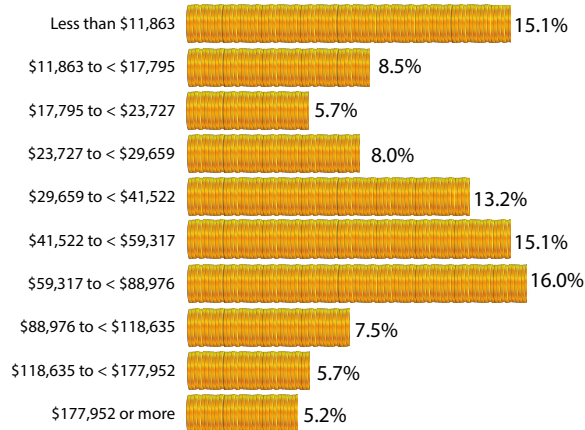
Quick stats



1 in 4 (26%) SCI individuals under age 65 has a job.

Figure 2. Annual Earnings After SCI

Earnings distribution among 212 employed individuals with SCI under age 65



Employment Equity Starts with Income



Half of SCI workers (50.5%) have earnings under \$41,522 per year.



31.1% earn mid-range incomes (\$41,522–\$88,976)



18% could be considered high earners, making over \$88,976.

What It Means for SCI Workers

This data highlights opportunities to advance economic inclusion and self-sufficiency, especially given the greater financial strain often experienced by SCI individuals.

Earnings adjusted from 2021 dollars to 2025 dollars using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). An inflation factor of 1.186 was applied, based on CPI values from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021: 270.97; May 2025: 321.465).



Hopes of Return-to-Work



Out of the 609 SCI individuals under age 65 who are not currently working, **more than half (52.2%)** express a desire to return to the workforce.



Beyond the Numbers

These results reflect the lived experiences of people with SCI striving for independence, financial stability, and inclusion. Each percentage demonstrates the need for accessible opportunities, fair wages, and supportive employment pathways.

The Door to Employment Remains Open for Many with SCI



Out of 613 valid responses from people with SCI who are under age 65 and not currently working, nearly **1 in 5 (18.3%)** reported that they are actively looking for a job.



It Takes More Than a Job Opening

Creating jobs is not enough. We need to build confidence, remove barriers, and offer real, practical support that helps SCI individuals believe employment is possible.

What You Can Do

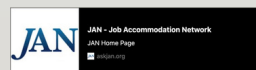
- ♥ Start vocational planning early during rehab to boost long-term chances of returning to work.
- ♥ Contact vocational rehab programs to receive personalized job support.
- ♥ Use adaptive tools or assistive technology to overcome physical barriers on the job.
- ♥ Understand your rights and benefits to confidently request accommodations and avoid losing support.

Resources

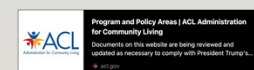
SSA Ticket to Work Program



Job Accommodation Network (JAN)



Centers for Independent Living (CILs)



National Spinal Cord Injury Association



About This Fact Sheet

This fact sheet is a product of the South Carolina spinal cord injury outcomes database, which is a study of outcomes among people with SCI in the state of South Carolina. The study was designed to help us better understand the needs of people with SCI in South Carolina and is supported by the South Carolina SCI Research Fund, grants 2017 SI-02 and 09-001. This fact sheet is not meant to replace the advice of your physician or other healthcare provider. You should always consult your physician or healthcare provider before making changes to behavior, treatment, or use of medicine.

