When we asked museum-goers what kinds of access and support their families could use at museums, there was one big takeaway: We all want our museums to be inviting places. Places that everyone can find comfortable and easy to visit. That means accessibility is important.

Over half of museum-goers indicated an access need, 53%, to be exact!

And their responses represented a variety of needs:

- Aging populations and their physical, cognitive, and social needs: 35%
- Physical or mobility disabilities: 29%
- Mental illness: 17%
- Learning or cognitive disabilities: 16%
- Deaf or hard of hearing: 15%
- Sensory sensitivities or Autism Spectrum Disorder: 15%
- Blind or low vision: 12%

Interestingly, age was not a significant factor in the responses. In fact, respondents under 30 and those over 70 averaged the same number of additional support needs: 1.5.

There were, of course, some support needs that skewed older, including:

- Aging populations and their physical, cognitive, and social needs
- Physical or mobility disabilities
- Deaf or hard of hearing
- Blind or low vision

But overall, reporting of accessibility needs broadly crossed age and life stage, making greater access a mainstream need of a majority of museum-goers ... as well as a future need for most of us.

Finally, accessibility is a reflection of our values. The work we do to improve access shows care and empathy for audiences that have accessibility needs ... and this care is valued not only by those who directly receive that support, but by their families and by other visitors who are increasingly expecting inclusion from museums.

Young adults under 30, however, were significantly more likely to indicate mental illness ... which can likely be attributed to a higher diagnosis rate of mental illness among younger adults than older adults.

The evidence also suggests that respondents thought broadly about the term “family,” often including extended family in their answers.

Aging populations and their physical, cognitive, and social needs
Physical or mobility disabilities
Deaf or hard of hearing
Blind or low vision
Mental illness
Learning or cognitive disabilities
Sensory sensitivities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

I value all efforts to answer the needs of all minorities and disabilities. Inclusion is so important.

Access is deeply valued as a visitor as a demonstration of how the museum is actively inviting and welcoming all potential visitors.

Sources include:
- 2020 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers
- 2020 Broader Population Sampling
- 2020 Online Pandemic Panel of Museum-Goers (ongoing)
- 2017 – 2019 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

1. National Institute of Mental Health

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