



## Research Brief

# A 25-year cross-sequential analysis of self-reported problems: Findings from 5 cohorts from the SCI Longitudinal Study

### Introduction

Many people with spinal cord injuries (SCI) reach aging milestones despite facing significant challenges. It is important to understand how health, psychological complications, and social problems affect this population as it ages, as well as individual and injury characteristics. Our objective is to evaluate how self-reported problems change over time among people with spinal cord injury (SCI).

### Key Findings

- Years post injury was negatively associated with initial status of problems of social isolation, emotional distress, environmental barriers, and lack of opportunities because participants with more years post injury at baseline reported lower scores on each factor.
- Longitudinally, with increased years post injury, higher scores were observed on the health problem factor. However, problems of social isolation, emotional distress, environmental barriers, money, and lack of opportunities decreased over time with increasing years post injury.

### Conclusion

After adjusting for sex, race/ethnicity, years of education, age at SCI onset and injury severity, our findings were consistent with previous research indicating that participants had more health problems with increasing years after SCI, but fewer problems of social isolation, emotional distress, environmental barriers, money, and lack of opportunities.

Many of the findings run contrary to the expectation of declining outcomes with aging since the changes over time in multiple aspects of problems are relatively small. Taken as a whole, the findings challenge the assumption that there will be substantial and dramatic declines in all areas of life because of aging. Certainly, there are indicators of health decline based on self-reported problems as was found in a recent analysis of hospitalizations and physician visits, but the findings also suggest that long-term survivors indeed adapt to their life after SCI. Some declines may reflect broader environmental change, such as those related to environmental barriers and lack of opportunities.