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00:00:04 Announcer/Brian

Welcome to Real Life Science, where we share clear and simple summaries of scientific research to help you understand how these findings can make everyday life better. Today, we explore a study about one-on-one travel training that helps people with disabilities travel more independently using buses and trains. For many, public transit is routine, but for some, it creates real challenges that affect their access to work, health care, and community activities. Let's see how practical instruction can build confidence and skills for safer travel in the real world.

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00:00:33 Narrator/Hannah

To dive deeper, let's look at what researchers wanted to learn about how the environment impacts people with SCI.

To understand how economic, built, and healthcare environments affect outcomes for people living with SCI, our scientists are collaborating with researchers from the national SCI Model System program. They are combining data resources that will facilitate studies of the effects of environmental factors on community living outcomes.

What did the research find about these neighborhood environments and their effects?

Researchers extracted indicators from administrative data such as employment, income, education, land use, and

physician density in each person's neighborhood and developed the following data points:

Economic environment:

- People living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods were more likely to report poor health. People living in economically advantaged neighborhoods were more likely to be employed than those in lower socioeconomic status areas

Built environment:

- Using satellite mapping, neighborhoods were classified as densely built, open low-rise (moderately developed), or sparsely built.
- People living in moderately developed neighborhoods were more likely to report full mobility independence, with better opportunities to engage in community activities

Healthcare environment:

- People living in counties with more primary care doctors and specialists reported lower rates of recent urinary tract infection. Provider availability did not predict other complications such as pressure ulcers or rehospitalization

So why do these findings matter for people living with spinal cord injuries?

Findings show that life after SCI depends on more than medical care. Living in neighborhoods with fewer economic or healthcare resources may create barriers to adjustment and participation. Understanding these factors helps clinicians, researchers, and policymakers:

- Identify people at greater risk for poor outcomes after rehabilitation
- Improve access to community resources for people living in underserved areas

How Your Neighborhood Can Affect Life After Spinal Cord Injury

Transcript

- Design environments that support mobility, employment, and overall well-being
- Our researchers are continuing to develop tools that help identify and improve environmental conditions for people with SCI.

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This summary is based on the presentation “Developing resources to understand the role of the environment in adjustment to spinal cord injury,” presented at the 2025 Academy of Spinal Cord Injury Professionals Annual Conference by Amanda Botticello, PhD, MPH, associate director, Center for Outcomes and Assessment Research.

Real-Life Science helps you see how science shapes real life by sharing research that matters for day-to-day health and well-being. Join us in spreading awareness about how our environments affect recovery and quality of life after spinal cord injury. To learn more, visit Kessler Foundation’s resources and stay informed about how research can improve outcomes for everyone.