

The **Sullivan method** or **Sullivan's method** is a very simple method to compute [health expectancies](#) . It combines data issued from a regular period of life table on the one hand and from cross-sectional survey providing prevalence of given health dimension on the other hand, for instance disability. The age-specific prevalence is directly applied to the person-year of the life table: it provides the total number of years spent with disability, the total number of years lived without disability, and summing both, the total number of years lived.

The main advantage of the Sullivan's method lies in the separate collection of [mortality](#) and disability data and in the ready availability of the data necessary for the calculation. Basic cross-sectional surveys are sufficient to collect the observed prevalence of disability within the population. However the problem with this method lies in approximating the period prevalence by the observed prevalence of disability.

The concept of health expectancies as health indicators was proposed by Sanders (1964) and the first example was published in a report of the US Department of Health Education and Welfare (Sullivan, 1971). This report contained preliminary estimates of " [disability-free life expectancy](#) " calculated using a method devised by Sullivan and applicable to any state of health definition. The term Sullivan Health Expectancy should be used as shorthand for health expectancy calculated by the Sullivan method.

The Sullivan health expectancy reflects the current health of a real population adjusted for mortality levels and independent of age structure. Health expectancy calculated by Sullivan's method is the number of remaining years, at a particular age, which an individual can expect to live in a healthy state (however health may be defined).

## Further information

- [Healthy Life Years \(from 2004 onwards\)](#) (ESMS metadata file — hlth\_hlye\_esms): see annex 1 "DFLE Calculation method".

## Related concepts

- [Disability-free life expectancy \(DFLE\)](#)
- [Life expectancy](#)
- [Mortality](#)

## Statistical data

- [Healthy life years statistics](#)