

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY



Presented to the ALA, by Access Living

WHO WE ARE



Since 1980, Access Living has challenged disability stereotypes, protected civil rights, and championed social reforms. We offer vital services, supports, and advocacy for Chicagoans with disabilities, and consulting services to companies and nonprofits to help make their work more inclusive. [Learn more about us!](#)

WHAT WE'LL DO TODAY... AND HOUSEKEEPING

- Discuss what disability is
- Learn how the ADA protects people with disabilities
- Explore evolving perspectives of disability and how what we think and say about disability has an impact
- Touch on disability identity and why it's important
- Talk about your work as it pertains to these topics

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION FOR TODAY

- Disability touches every space that humanity touches
- While specific topics in this series of presentations may not directly apply to the work you do, they apply to the broader landscape of inclusive work
- Being able to pull from this knowledge base is an asset that will set you apart as a leader in your field
- Big picture thinking leads to better inclusion across the board

QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

- When you think of a person with a disability, do you have sympathy or feel pity for the person?
- When you meet a person with a disability, do you see the person's disability before you see the person?
- Do you speak to and interact with people with disabilities differently than you do with people without disabilities?
- Do you perceive people with disabilities as being as productive or competent as people without disabilities?

WHAT IS DISABILITY?

- A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity
- Can occur on a spectrum
- Visible, hidden, or both
- Ebbs and flows
- Can acquire at any age

HOW COMMON IS DISABILITY REALLY?

- 1 in 4 (roughly 26%) of U.S. adults report having a disability that's about 61 million people
- Some of the most common disabilities are:
 - Mobility disabilities (13.7%)
 - Cognitive disabilities (10.8%)
 - Hearing (5.9%)
 - Vision (4.6%)
- 2 in 5 individuals over 65 have a disability
- 1 in 4 women have a disability

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT NON-APPARENT DISABILITIES

- Non-apparent disabilities are common
 - The CDC estimates that about 10% of the 61 million US adults that identify as having a disability have a non-apparent one
 - Likely many more unidentified or unreported cases of disability in the US
- People with non-apparent disabilities are protected by the ADA and entitled to reasonable accommodations
- Non-apparent disabilities can ebb and flow
- People of all ages have, and can acquire, non-apparent disabilities

Evolving Perspectives of Disability

Medical / Charity Model

- Disability = fixing
- Pros know best
- Special needs
- Need help



Social / Cultural Model

- Natural part of life
- Own best advocates
- We have civil rights



INDEPENDENT LIVING PHILOSOPHY

- People with disabilities can and should live self-directed lives whenever possible
- People with disabilities exist in all of the spaces and places people without disabilities exist
- Creating opportunities for empowerment is essential to inclusion

WHAT IS THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT?

- Approved in 1990, the ADA is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability
- The ADA defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
- Major life activities include most things: working, walking, listening, seeing, and self-care
- Also protects people regarded by others as having an impairment (like facial scarring)

What does the ADA cover?

Title I Employment

- One cannot face workplace discrimination due to disability

Title II Public Services: State and Local Government

- One cannot be discriminated against due to disability in regards to public programs and activities and services

Title III Public Accommodations and Services Operated by Private Entities

- Businesses and spaces open to the public cannot discriminate due to disability

THE PROMISE OF THE ADA HAS NOT BEEN REALIZED

- Disabled people are disproportionately unemployed
- COVID-19 has amplified disparity for disabled people across sectors
- Advocacy continues to evolve throughout the disability community across intersectional groups

The ADA logo is centered within a white rounded square. It features the letters "ADA" in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below "ADA", the words "Americans with Disabilities Act" are written in a smaller, black sans-serif font, stacked on two lines. The white square is set against a background of two vertical red bars, one above and one below it.

ADA
Americans with
Disabilities Act

PERSON FIRST VS IDENTITY FIRST LANGUAGE

- **Person First Language:** language that puts the person before their diagnosis
 - Person with a disability
- **Pro:** This type of language reinforces that a person is a person first and a diagnosis second
- **Con:** Using identity first language may lead some people to believe that a person's disability is all-defining

PERSON FIRST VS IDENTITY FIRST LANGUAGE

- **Identity First Language:** language that leads with a person's diagnosis
 - Disabled person
- **Pro:** Some communities such as the autistic or Deaf communities view disability as a part of who they are and as such lead with that identity
 - As disability pride movements continue, we're seeing a shift to identity first language in certain spaces
- **Con:** Using identity first language may lead some people to believe that a person's disability is all-defining

WHICH SHOULD YOU USE?

- There is no always right answer because so much of language is preference
- **When in Doubt:** Use person first language – until someone has shared if they have a preference, err on the side of person-first language
- Don't assume, ask
 - Know that some individuals may not be comfortable answering questions in certain settings

DISABILITY LANGUAGE

Words to Avoid	Instead Use
Wheelchair Bound/ Confined to a Wheelchair	Uses Wheelchair/Wheelchair User
Suffers from	Has...
Diverse Abilities/Special Needs/ Challenged Crippled/Cripple	People with Disabilities/Disabled
Able Bodied/Normal	Non-Disabled/Person without a Disability

DISABILITY LANGUAGE

Words to Avoid	Instead Use
Handicapped Parking	Accessible Parking
Hearing Impairment/Visual Impairment	Deaf/Hard of Hearing Blind/Low Vision
Mental Retardation	Person with a Cognitive/ Developmental/Intellectual Disability


TAKE ACTION: DEVELOP AN INCLUSIVE MINDSET

- Get in the habit of asking - how is the disability community impacted by X?
- Don't think of disability inclusion as a separate exercise but something that is incorporated into what you're already doing
- Budget appropriately for accessibility
- Recruit and work with people with disabilities
- Tap into the expertise the disability community has to offer

Are the tools you're using accessible? What does true inclusion look like?



QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- How does disability touch the work you do?
 - What are some key takeaways for you from today's content?
- 

THANK YOU!



ALA American
Library
Association



ACCESS
LIVING