

The Law

The ADA Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-336) gives civil rights protection to individuals with disabilities that are like those provided to individuals on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in employments, accommodations, transportation, state and local government services and telecommunications.

Specifically TITLE III: Public Accommodations and Services Operated by Private Entities. Private entities such as restaurants, theaters, museums, hotels and retail stores may not discriminate against individuals with disabilities, effective January 26, 1992. Auxiliary aids and service must be provided to individuals with vision or hearing impairments or other individuals with disabilities, unless an undue burden would result. Physical barriers in existing facilities must be removed, if removal is readily achievable. If not, alternative methods of providing the services must be offered, if they are readily achievable. All new construction and alterations of facilities must be accessible.

People First Language

People with disabilities are – first and foremost – people who have individual abilities, interests and needs. They are moms, dads, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, friends, neighbors, coworkers, students and teachers. About 54 million Americans -- one out of every five individuals -- have a disability. Their contributions enrich our communities and society as they live, work and share their lives.

People with disabilities constitute our nation's largest minority group, which is simultaneously the most inclusive and the most diverse. Everyone is represented: of all genders, all ages, all religions, all socioeconomic levels and all ethnic backgrounds. The disability community is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time.

The language a society uses to refer to persons with disabilities shapes its beliefs and ideas about them. Words are powerful; Old, inaccurate, and inappropriate descriptors perpetuate negative stereotypes and attitudinal barriers. When we describe people by their labels of medical diagnoses, we devalue and disrespect them as individuals. In contrast, using thoughtful terminology can foster positive attitudes about persons with disabilities. One of the major improvements in communicating with and about people with disabilities is "People-First Language." People-First Language emphasizes the person, not the disability. By placing the person first, the disability is no longer the primary, defining characteristic of an individual, but one of several aspects of the whole person. People-First Language is an objective way of acknowledging, communicating, and reporting on disabilities. It eliminates generalizations and stereotypes, by focusing on the person rather than the disability.

Disability is not the “problem.” For example, a person who wears glasses doesn’t say, “I have a problem seeing,” they say, “I wear/need glasses.” Similarly, a person who uses a wheelchair doesn’t say, “I have a problem walking,” they say, “I use/need a wheelchair.”

Interacting with People with Disabilities

The most important thing to remember when interacting with people with disabilities is exactly that -they're people. While terminology and self-identity are always changing, if you apply the 3 C's - Common sense, Courtesy, and Consideration - to your association with all people, you can't go wrong. This is good advice when training your staff and volunteers.

A Universal Environment for the ARTS

A universal or inclusive environment for the arts is one that is usable by everyone, people with and without disabilities and people of all ages. It is an environment with a physical plant (buildings and grounds) and communication systems that are usable by everyone. It is an environment where programs and exhibits are chosen that reflect a commitment to being part of an inclusive community.

- 54 million Americans report some level of disability.
- Fewer than 15% of people with disabilities were born with them.
- One third of Americans with disabilities are 65 or older.
- By age 40 some form of joint deterioration -particularly hips and knees- is experienced by 90% of Americans.
- A 60-year-old needs twice as much light as a 40-year-old to read a program.
- The number of Americans with hearing impairments equals the population of California.
- The United States Census Bureau estimates that people with disabilities have over \$188 billion annually in disposable income.