



Lunch & Learn Series

Disability 101

People with disabilities are your community.

People with disabilities make up about 25% of the population across the United States, according to the CDC. ¹ That's one in four people. People with disabilities are your friends, neighbors, and loved ones. People with disabilities are in your community right now.

All issues are disability issues.

Disability cuts across all backgrounds, races, and ethnicities. Disability is directly linked to issues like climate change. More than that, disability is the only minority that anyone can join at any time, making disability issues relevant for everyone.

People with disabilities are disproportionately low income.

In 2023, only about 21% of people with disabilities were employed, compared to about 68% of people without disabilities. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities was more than double that of people without disabilities. ² Nearly a quarter of people with disabilities are living below the poverty line. ³ Issues of economy, employment, and income directly affect people with disabilities.

Our population is aging.

Over one third of the population ages 65 and over report a disability. ⁴ As Baby Boomers age, more of them will become disabled. Disability is our future.

Defining Disability

According to the Developmental Disabilities Act, section 102(8), "the term 'developmental disability' means a severe, chronic disability of an individual 5 years of age or older that:

- Is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments;
- Is manifested before the individual attains age 22;
- Is likely to continue indefinitely;
- Results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity; Self-care; Receptive and expressive language; Learning; Mobility; Self-direction; Capacity for independent living; and Economic self-sufficiency.

Reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, supports, or other assistance that is of lifelong or extended duration and is individually planned and coordinated.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/features/disability-prevalence-rural-urban.html#:~:text=Approximately%20one%20in%20four%20adults,likely%20to%20have%20a%20disability>

² <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/employment-population-ratio-for-people-with-a-disability-increases-to-series-high-in-2023.htm>

³ Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2022). Disability Statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute (YTI). Retrieved from Cornell University Disability Statistics website: www.disabilitystatistics.org

⁴ Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2022). Disability Statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute (YTI). Retrieved from Cornell University Disability Statistics website: www.disabilitystatistics.org

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-106publ402/html/PLAW-106publ402.htm>

<https://www.thinkwork.org/federal-definition-developmental-disabilities>



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Statewide Advocates Influencing Leadership (SAIL) is a community-driven coalition and training project focused on fostering leadership and advocacy among people with disabilities across Pennsylvania. Our group is designed by and for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that the support we provide is both relevant and impactful.



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Disability Etiquette: Tips for Respectful Communication and Interaction

1. Offer Assistance, but Always Ask First

- If you think someone might need help, ask them first.
- Follow their instructions to ensure your assistance is helpful and respectful.

2. Speak Directly to the Individual

- Always talk directly to the person, not their friend, aide, or interpreter.
- This shows respect and avoids making the person feel invisible.

3. Respect Personal Property

- Assistive devices like wheelchairs, canes, or hearing aids are extensions of the individual.
- Unless given explicit permission, do not touch, move, or lean on these devices.

4. Adjust Your Position When Needed

- When speaking with someone using a wheelchair, position yourself at eye level for more comfortable and direct communication.

5. Communicate Clearly with the Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Show your face while talking to help with lip-reading or visual cues.
- Don't shout unless specifically requested—it's often not helpful.

6. Greet and Identify Yourself

- When interacting with someone with a visual impairment, introduce yourself clearly.
- Let them know if you move or need to end the conversation.

7. Treat Adults as Adults

- Avoid speaking to adults with disabilities in a patronizing tone or treating them as children.
- Respect their independence and autonomy.

Why It Matters:

Disability etiquette fosters respect, understanding, and inclusion. Small changes in how we interact can make a big difference in creating welcoming and supportive environments for everyone.



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