Healthcare Encounters Serving Patients with Disabilities

Resources for Providers

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Accessible healthcare is essential to ensuring all patients receive safe, equitable, and effective care. HealthPartners, Hennepin Health, and Medica worked together to create this resource toolkit for providers on serving patients with disabilities during healthcare encounters.

The resources can be used as training and guidance on the anticipation of physical disability accommodations, effective communication and use of auxiliary aids and services, understanding federal ADA requirements, and supporting improvement of disability access in healthcare. Providers can also listen to the perspectives of patients with disabilities on healthcare and health equity.

Click the links below to access resources.

Physical Accommodations and Anticipating Patient Needs

Access to Medical Care for Individuals with Mobility Disabilities

Accessible healthcare is essential to ensuring all patients receive safe, equitable, and effective care. This resource introduces providers to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and practical approaches for accommodating individuals with mobility disabilities in healthcare settings. Participants will learn how accessible facilities, equipment, policies, and staff practices contribute to a positive patient experience and improved health outcomes.

Accommodations for Patients with Disabilities in Healthcare Facilities

Providing accessible, equitable healthcare is an essential component of high-quality patient care. This resource from the Disability Equity Collaborative introduces healthcare professionals to accommodations that support patients with disabilities and help ensure equal access to healthcare services. Participants will review practical strategies for reducing barriers to care, enhancing communication, and fostering an inclusive care environment that meets the diverse needs of patients with disabilities.

Examples of Disability Accommodations in Healthcare Settings

Providing accessible, equitable care requires healthcare professionals to understand and implement accommodations that address the diverse needs of patients with disabilities. This resource provided by the Disability Equity Collaborative reviews practical examples of disability accommodations across healthcare settings, including policy and workflow adaptations, communication supports, accessible equipment, environmental modifications, and staff assistance strategies. Participants will gain a greater understanding of how accommodations can reduce barriers to care and support a positive patient experience.

How to Help Someone Who Uses a Mobility Device

Providing respectful, person-centered support to individuals who use mobility devices is an important component of an accessible and inclusive healthcare environment. This resource from Triumph Mobility reviews best practices for interacting with and assisting individuals who use wheelchairs, walkers, rollators, and other mobility devices. Participants will learn how to offer assistance appropriately, support patient independence, and promote dignity and safety during healthcare interactions.

Accessibility Audit for Healthcare Settings

People with disabilities continue to be underserved by the health care system, and barriers to equitable care exist at every step of an appointment, from arrival to aftercare instructions. Even after clinics comply with regulations for mobility-related accessibility, they frequently fall short for patients with cognitive, sensory, and developmental disabilities. True inclusivity requires expansive, creative, community-informed problem solving and dedication to making services work for all patients. This tool from the Minnesota Department of Health provides an initial list of questions to prompt a reevaluation of your clinic's compliance and facilitate an ongoing effort to expand accessibility.

Communication and the Use of Auxiliary Aids and Services

Understanding Auxiliary Aids and Services in Healthcare

Healthcare settings present unique challenges for individuals with disabilities, ranging from communication barriers to physical access issues. Learn the definition of auxiliary aids and services, their implementation in healthcare settings, common challenges and solutions, best practices, and inclusivity in healthcare from Know-the-ADA.

Working Effectively with an Interpreter

How does a provider prepare for a clinic visit with a patient who needs an interpreter? What do they do during the visit to ensure effective communication? Use this checklist by Think Cultural Health to guide your approach to patient interaction when an interpreter is present in support of positive health outcomes.

Effective Communication – Auxiliary aids and services, Sign language interpreters, and Telecommunications

The goal of auxiliary aids and services for people with disabilities is to provide an effective means of communication for specific circumstances. Effective use depends on the individual's needs and the nature and complexity of what is being communicated. Read about accessible formats, example aids and services, and what the ADA requires of public entities from the ADA National Network.

Disability Etiquette: How to engage with people with disabilities

Practicing disability etiquette is an easy way to make people with disabilities feel welcomed. This guide created by North Dakota Health & Human Services offers quick at-a-glance tips for interacting with people with disabilities, including those who are blind or have low vision, are deaf and/or have hearing loss, have difficulty with speech, or use a personal mobility device like a wheelchair. The guide also outlines appropriate language for a people first, disability second approach.

Considerations When Working with People with Disabilities

Health equity is not possible without including considerations for people with disabilities or unique health needs. Read the basics of how to communicate clearly, allow personal space, show patience and respect, and use people-first language as defined by the Minnesota Department of Health.

Communication Access Resources: Communication Aids

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) provides healthcare planning tools to support care partner communication. Resources include general communication access checklists, hearing-specific tools, and toolkits for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Their webpage also offers lists of example accommodations, supportive communication strategies, and information on assistive technology.

Voices of Patients with Disabilities

In Our Own Words: Improving Care for People with Disabilities

- Part one: "Communication" – 5:32
- Part two: "Understanding" – 6:06
- This two-part video series produced by the Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, shares individuals' personal stories and perspectives on how clinicians can improve care for people with disabilities by improving communication, addressing medical bias and stigma.

Disabled Not Disposable: A Health Equity Conference from The Disabled Patient's Perspective

Hosted by Gillette Children's and HealthPartners, this conference recording offers four sessions with speakers and advocates from the disability community:

1. **Ableism and Disability Bias in Healthcare** – 48:00
   In this session we define ableism and disability bias; quickly walk over some common models of disability and explain why the medical model is problematic. We provide real world examples of how ableism has shown up in disabled patient's experience with the healthcare system. Finally, we provide tactics on how medical professionals can challenge their own ableism within their practices.

2. **Inclusive Communication with Disabled Patients** – 53:00
   In this session we go over the basics of accessible and inclusive communication, including what it means to have culturally informed communication with clients from different backgrounds, touch briefly on specific communication styles and languages, and discuss tools to help healthcare professionals build the skills to effectively communicate with their disabled patients.
3. **Intersectionality** – 59:00
   When someone has more than one marginalized identity, it can dramatically change their experience of disability. In healthcare, some members of the disabled community face an increase in outcome disparity due to intersectional factors. To really illustrate how different identities change someone's disability experience and how this is relevant in healthcare, this session is a panel with 3 members of the disabled community. Some of the intersections that will be discussed include: disabled and BIPOC, disabled and LGBTQ, developmental disability and eating disorders, mental illness and other disability.
4. **Barriers to Care** – 50:00
   In this session we discuss ways to ensure practitioners, clinics, and hospitals create experiences that make disabled patients want to keep coming back for care. We look at how person-centered care, seeing the person with a disability as a person first, is more than ensuring that your clinic has an ADA checklist. We discuss sensory-friendly exam rooms, and the importance of a quiet exam room, and more.

Improving Disability Access in Healthcare

The Disability Equity Collaborative (DEC)

The DEC provides evidence-based knowledge, practical solutions and tools to improve disability access in healthcare. DEC has created an implementation guide for health care organizations of all sizes that want to improve the quality of the care they provide to patients with disabilities. It is based on best practices identified in evidence-based resources.

- Each chapter walks users through completing needs assessments for the topic, identifying barriers and strategies, garnering organizational support and more.
- The Implementation Guide includes sample worksheets, workflows and documentation in the appendices.
- Current chapters include:
  - Building a Disability Accessibility Program
  - Documenting Disability Status and Accommodation Needs

    - Providing Accommodations
    - Effective Communication
    - Accessible Medical Diagnostic Equipment
    - Accessible Physical Structures and Features
    - General Resources
  - New chapters are added as needed
  - DEC offers webinars to support clinics to provide the best care to patients with disabilities. The News and Events tab shows all upcoming and archived webinars and relevant news updates.

Understanding Federal ADA Requirements

ADA Requirements of Effective Communication

Familiarity with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements on effective communication with people who have vision, hearing, or speech disabilities helps healthcare providers know what is expected of them and their entities. The key to deciding what aid or service is needed to communicate effectively is to consider the nature, length, complexity, and context of the communication as well as the person's normal method(s) of communication. Learn the purpose of the rules, what auxiliary aids and services must be provided, and how to decide what aid or service is appropriate directly from the ADA website.

Effective Communication and the use of Auxiliary Aids and Services

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) outlines the general requirements and prohibitions of regulations relevant to communicating effectively with people with disabilities using auxiliary aids and services, including Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Read the appropriate steps recipients must take to ensure effective communication with all applicants, participants, and members of the public in their programs and activities.

Working with Individuals with Disabilities

This document, published by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS), is a self-guided course about federal non-discrimination requirements when caring for people with disabilities. Learn about legal protections for people with disabilities, types of reasonable modifications, best practices, and discover resources that help caregivers and providers assist individuals with disabilities. The document also includes information about assister duties under Section 1557 of the ACA and other applicable regulations, including CMS regulations.

More Resource Links

- https://adata.org/factsheet/healthcare/
- https://www.cdc.gov/disability-and-health/about/disability-and-health-information-for-healthcare-providers.html
- https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/section-1557/fs-disability/index.html
- https://www.asha.org/practice/communication-access/
- https://www.asha.org/practice/communication-access/education-training-and-implementation/
- Getting the Care You Need: Guide for People with Disabilities https://www.cms.gov/files/document/getting-care-you-need-guide-people-disabilities.pdf
- Docs with Disabilities Initiative https://www.docswithdisabilities.org/

Resources in Minnesota

- https://www.disability.state.mn.us/
- https://www.health.state.mn.us/people/disabilities.html
- https://disabilityhubmn.org/
- https://mylegalaid.org/disability-law-center/
- https://www.olmsteadrights.org/self-helptools/advocacy-resources/item.6981-Minnesota_Disability_Resources_and_Advocacy_Organizations
- https://www.disability.state.mn.us/additional-resources/#access
- https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/equity/about/disabilityetiquette.pdf