

Living with Disability Fact Sheet

Fifty three million adults in the United States live with a disability. (1) According to the U.S. Census, 24 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have a disability. (2) That's almost one in every four AI/ANs living with a disability.

~1 in 4 AI/ANs



live with a disability

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A DISABILITY?

Disability is a general term used to describe any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them. (1) Disabilities can be visible, hidden, or unnoticed by others. They can begin as a condition from birth or result later in life from injury or disease. As we age, the likelihood of living with a disability increases.

There are many different types of physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities that may affect a person's vision, hearing, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, or social relationships. Medical, legal, and social definitions of disability vary as each seek to define specific conditions to determine eligibility for services, to decide policy or legal matters, to reflect cultural values, or to represent individual experiences with disability. AI/AN communities may have their own definitions of disability. (3)

CARE AND SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

When caring for a person with disabilities, it's essential to have a greater understanding about what it is like for that person to live with a disability. Knowing the individual, their culture and values, and how they perceive their condition and abilities are equally important. Conditions usually occur along a spectrum so that two people with the same impairment - loss of vision, for example - may have very different levels of function, and need varying levels of care and support, while others may have other co-occurring conditions.

Medical professionals, as well as family members and caregivers, should provide services and support that help people with disabilities maintain their dignity and independence. Services and support should focus on person-centered care that emphasizes respect for the individual and their preferences, needs, and values. It should also include listening to, informing, and involving them in their care to help people with disabilities guide their own care. If their condition is likely to progress or impact their ability to problem solve or communicate, advance care planning, and directives can ensure that their wishes are in writing.

DISABILITY IN INDIAN COUNTRY

People with disabilities in Indian Country often go unserved or are underserved. Tribal communities lack employment or day programs for adults living with developmental disabilities, and there is not enough transportation available for people who cannot drive themselves. (3) Within Indian Country, some of the biggest barriers to accessing services are inadequate funding, personnel shortages, lack of coordination among agencies, lack of consultation with tribes, and problems identifying persons eligible for services. (4) Recent efforts among tribal governments and service programs to improve facility accessibility and provide assisted technology (TTY phone assistance, captioned media) offer hope to people with disabilities that they can participate in activities that are important to them.

AI/ANs living with disabilities deserve equal access, fair accommodations, and an opportunity to make powerful contributions to their society. Indian Country is known for making room for everybody. What you can do to help, is look at your community and make it more accessible to our Elders and others living with disabilities. Be a champion by advocating and making life easier for everyone.

SOURCES

- 1) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *CDC: 53 million adults in the US live with a disability*, July 30, 2015, www.cdc.gov
- 2) U.S. Census, American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 2009.
- 3) Cohen, L., et al 2012 Native American developmental disabilities needs assessment. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from the Association from University Centers on Disabilities: http://www.aucd.org/docs/publications/native_am_needs_assmt_sm.pdf
- 4) National Congress of American Indians, Disabilities, retrieved July 12, 2017. www.ncai.org