

# Tips for Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

## One in five Americans has a Disability

According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), “disability” means, with respect to an individual:

- A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities
- A record of such an impairment
- Or being regarded as having such an impairment

Disabilities include physical, sensory, cognitive, or mental impairments.

Barriers to healthcare can be physical or architectural, communicative, attitudinal, and social/economical.

Increased accessibility decreases healthcare costs and improves the health of individuals with disabilities.

Federal tax credits and deductions are available to private businesses to offset the expenses required to comply with the ADA.

## General Communication Tips

- Use person first language – “the person with a disability” rather than “the disabled person”
- Use a normal volume and tone when speaking to persons with disabilities
- Avoid inappropriate descriptors like “handicapped”, “retarded”, “crippled”, or “special”
- Always offer help but wait for acceptance



## Physical Disabilities

- A wheelchair = a person’s personal space – ask before pushing or touching it
- Get on eye level with a person in a wheelchair to talk
- Keep walk ways and hall ways free of clutter and barriers

## Visual Disabilities

- Introduce yourself by name and role when approaching
- Ask if assistance is needed—offer your arm rather than taking theirs
- Don’t touch a guide dog without the owner’s permission and walk on the opposite side of a guide dog
- Have large print format if needed
- Use Braille signage to the right of doorways
- Announce when you leave the room

## Hearing Disabilities

- Face and speak directly to the person and make sure you have their attention
- Rephrase rather than repeat sentences a person doesn’t understand
- Tap on the shoulder or wave your hand to get their attention
- Hire certified American Sign Language interpreters if required—do not rely on family members as interpreters

## Cognitive or Intellectual Disabilities

- Provide information in plain language
- Ask the individual to repeat the information they’ve received to be sure it was understood
- Never pretend to understand what a person says—ask them to repeat it slowly