

Disabilities

The President is committed to nurturing a society that values the contributions of all of our citizens and residents, including the approximately 50 million people in this country living with disabilities.

At a Glance

Nearly a quarter-century ago, we became the first nation on earth to comprehensively declare equality for its citizens with disabilities. With passage of the ADA, we enshrined into law the promise of equal access, equal opportunity, and equal respect for every American.

Today, 19 percent of Americans (56.7 million people) live with disabilities. President Obama and his Administration are dedicated to ensuring that people with disabilities have the same access to the American Dream as every other citizen.

That's why this Administration has worked to toughen the protections against disability-based discrimination, increase accessibility in our communities, expand employment opportunities and increase financial independence for people with disabilities.

Expanding Educational Opportunities

Investing in access to education will best prepare our youth and young adults with disabilities to meet the needs of the 21st century.

President Obama supports improved educational opportunities for people with disabilities. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization proposal will increase support for the inclusion and improved outcomes of students with disabilities, ensuring that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of diverse learners and that assessments more accurately and appropriately measure the performance of students with disabilities. President Obama also supports expanded funding and increased enforcement for programs like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that ensure all Americans have access to the tools to succeed.

The Department of Justice and Department of Education issued a joint Dear Colleague letter to schools reminding them that bullying is wrong and must not be tolerated – including against America's 6.5 million students with disabilities.

Increasing Employment Opportunities

The Obama Administration is focused on providing Americans with disabilities with access to the resources and training necessary for them to succeed in the workplace.

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA)

President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) into law, placing significant new responsibilities on several Cabinet-level agencies that have the responsibility for increasing the employment of individuals with disabilities, particularly the Department of Labor and the Department of Education. These agencies will take the primary lead in furthering various initiatives within their departments designed to advance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

SECTION 503 REGULATIONS

New rules under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act have taken effect and mandate that all federal contractors must take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain individuals with disabilities. These regulations established a 7 percent utilization goal for individuals with disabilities and also require increased data collection and record keeping to improve employer accountability.

The Administration has launched the Curb Cuts to the Middle Class Initiative, a cross-agency effort focused on helping people with disabilities prepare to qualify for the array of jobs offered by federal contractors and provide federal contractors with the tools and resources they need to recruit, retain, and promote people with disabilities.

EXECUTIVE ORDER 13548, ON INCREASING FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Recognizing that Americans with disabilities have an employment rate far lower than that of Americans without disabilities, and that they are underrepresented in the federal workforce, President Obama issued Executive Order 13548 to establish the federal government as a model employer of individuals with disabilities. Four years into that commitment, OPM reports that 57,491 workers with disabilities have entered the federal workforce, more than half of the executive order's goal. More people with disabilities are in federal service than at any time in the past 33 years.

Strengthening Health Care

President Obama placed comprehensive health reform at the top of his domestic policy agenda. The President signed into law the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which provides many benefits for people with disabilities.

- The ACA ends discrimination on the basis of pre-existing condition and bans caps on lifetime benefits.
- The ACA bars insurance companies from discrimination on the basis of medical history or genetic information.
- The ACA establishes the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports (CLASS) program, a self-funded and voluntary long-term care insurance choice that would help people with

disabilities remain in their homes, communities, and jobs through cash benefits to pay for community support services.

- The ACA advances community living by extending the Money Follows the Person program, improving the Medicaid home-and-community-based services (HCBS) option.
- The ACA establishes the Community First Choice Option covering community-based attendant services and supports to help Medicaid beneficiaries with daily activities and health-related tasks.
- The ACA enhances health care delivery by establishing standards for medical diagnostic equipment so people with disabilities can access vital preventative care.

Promoting Civil Rights and Access

President Obama's Administration has vigorously enforced existing laws and promoted disability rights around the world.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is landmark legislation that has done much to protect people with disabilities from discrimination; however, President Obama continues to push for more consistent and effective enforcement of ADA, which can do more to prevent discrimination in employment, public services, and public accommodations. For example, in late 2012, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission adopted a Strategic Enforcement Plan, identifying certain emerging issues under the ADA as a national enforcement priority. In addition to its Olmstead enforcement actions, the Department of Justice has also focused its enforcement priorities under the ADA issues surrounding access to technology. The Department of Justice is working to ensure that technology improves access instead of creating new barriers for individuals living with disabilities.

OLMSTEAD ENFORCEMENT

The Department of Justice entered into a first-of-its-kind settlement agreement with the State of Rhode Island that will provide relief to approximately 3,250 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have been, or who are at risk of, unnecessary segregation in sheltered workshops or facility-based day programs. Under the court-enforceable Consent Decree, individuals with disabilities will have access to an array of services, giving them the opportunity to receive meaningful employment in integrated community settings at competitive wages.

SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY

President Obama is committed to increasing innovation and access to technology for Americans with disabilities. As part of the President's initiative to make government information available to all Americans through accessible electronic and information technology under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Chief Acquisition Officer and the Chief Information Officer issued a memo to

make agencies aware of existing resources and direct agencies to improve the acquisition and implementation of accessible technology.

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Under President Obama's leadership, the U.S. signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adding America to the then-list of 141 countries signing the first new human rights treaty of the 21st Century.