

National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

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What is a disability?

According to the legal definition set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act, a person with a disability is someone who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

However, this definition doesn't really offer a full picture of disability. It's important to acknowledge the diversity of disability. Disabilities can be visible or invisible, something a person is born with or acquired at any point in life. Many people simply envision a wheelchair when thinking about disability, but there are so many types of disabilities beyond mobility disabilities.



Types of Disabilities

At least 5 million Americans are estimated to have a developmental disability. According to the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act), the term *developmental disability* means a severe, chronic disability that occurs before an individual is 22 that is likely to continue indefinitely, and results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity. These activities include, self-care, receptive and expressive language, learning, mobility, self-direction, capacity for independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. These



impairments require the individual to sustain lifelong or extended support or assistance. Diagnosed conditions may include intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, or spina bifida.

The key is to recognize that disability itself is not a problem; it is a natural part of the human experience. Traditionally, donors have mostly approached disability using the medical model, but the social model is

important to understand the way disability intersects with and is caused by other inequalities.

Just to keep in mind, disability cuts across class, gender, race, ethnicity, but being disabled disproportionately affects those living in poverty, women, and Black and non-Black people of color.

You can find government and local disability programs and services that offers assistance. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Click on the image below to view the video from the D.C. Office of Disability Rights, which discusses the general rules of etiquette for interacting with people with disabilities. We promise – you will enjoy this short video and be entertained while learning!

