

ACCESSIBILITY IN YOUR HEALTH CARE PRACTICE

People with disabilities face many barriers to good health. Data show that adults with disabilities in Delaware are more likely than adults without disabilities to report:

- Having poor overall health
- Being obese or diagnosed with diabetes or high blood pressure
- Engaging in risky health behaviors, including smoking and physical inactivity.¹

People with disabilities often are more susceptible to preventable health problems that decrease their overall health and quality of life. Secondary conditions such as pain, fatigue, obesity and depression can occur as a result of having a disabling condition.

Health disparities and secondary conditions can be the result of inaccessible health care facilities and equipment, lack of knowledge among health professionals about specific differences among people with disabilities, transportation difficulties, and higher poverty rates among people with disabilities.

Accessibility applies to both communication and physical access. For instance, health professionals need to be aware of how to effectively communicate with patients who have a range of disabilities, including people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have a speech, vision or intellectual disability. Providers should ensure that accessible medical equipment is available for people with disabilities (such as accessible scales, examination tables or chairs)².

A question to ask ALL patients when scheduling an appointment:

“Do you have any needs related to a disability that we can assist you with during your visit?”

Examples:

- *Help with dressing or undressing*
- *Understanding medical information*
- *Positioning during a procedure, such as a mammogram*
- *Help with completing forms*
- *A sign language interpreter*
- *Adjustable medical equipment that goes low enough for someone seated in a wheelchair*

¹ Center for Disabilities Studies, University of Delaware (2011). *Disability and Health in Delaware*, Delaware Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2009 Select Data. By P. Tressell, S. Romelczyk, I.K. Riddle, and E. Sparling. Newark, DE.

<http://www.gohdwd.org/documents/DisabilityandHealthinDelaware.pdf>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Disability and Health Program, Information for Health Care Providers*,

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/hcp.html>.

ASK. ACCOMMODATE. COMMUNICATE.

Most patients with disabilities require only simple accommodations to ensure full access to care. Consider asking about any needed accommodations when scheduling appointments. Your patients' experience will be enhanced by getting this information *before the appointment* so that staff will be prepared to meet each patient's health needs during the visit.

Resources to Improve Accessibility in Your Practice

Access to Medical Care For Individuals with Mobility Disabilities

http://www.ada.gov/medcare_mobility_ta/medcare_ta.pdf

In this document from the U.S. Dept. of Justice you will find information on general requirements, commonly asked questions, accessible exam rooms and medical equipment.

Talking to People with Disabilities

http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/pdf/DisabilityPoster_Photos.pdf

This fact sheet gives examples of respectful language.

The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Improve the Health and Wellness of Persons with Disabilities

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/disabilities/calltoaction/>

Tax Incentives for Businesses, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section

<http://www.ada.gov/taxincent.pdf>

Disability and Health in Delaware, Delaware Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2009 Select Data <http://www.gohdwd.org/documents/DisabilityandHealthinDelaware.pdf>

This report outlines the prevalence of chronic disease, lifestyle risk factors and preventive behaviors in the population with and without disabilities.

Overweight and Obesity Among People with Disabilities

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/documents/obesityFactsheet2010.pdf>

This fact sheet highlights the high prevalence of obesity in the disability population.

For more information please contact the Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities Project at the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies at 302-831-6974.

Visit the Healthy Delawareans with Disabilities website at www.gohdwd.org.

GoHDWD.org

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