



Barriers and Strategies to Health Care Access for people with disabilities

A fact sheet for clinicians and public health professionals

People with disabilities represent the largest minority group in the United States. Like most Americans, health care is a central concern for people with disabilities and research has shown that people with disabilities experience difficulty in accessing health care.

How this fact sheet was made

First, we gathered identified barriers and aids to health care access for people with disabilities from peer-reviewed literature.

Next, we validated those findings by comparing them with barriers and aids identified by over 900 people with disabilities in an online survey.

Finally, we had experts in the field review this document to confirm that our findings reflect their knowledge base.

Barriers to health care access

The literature showed that insurance coverage status was a common barrier. People with disabilities reported that:

- they were not covered by insurance at all;
- the necessary health care or tests/procedures were not covered under their insurance plan; and/or
- they had insurance, but co-pays and deductibles were too costly.

Problems with health care provider knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes towards people with disabilities were described in the literature. People with disabilities got more specific by stating that:

- they couldn't find a primary health care provider in the area who had expertise with and was willing to treat people with disabilities; and/or
- they couldn't find a primary provider who had adaptable equipment to enable them to receive primary/preventive medical tests.

Access to the system was a barrier often described in journal articles. People with disabilities gave the example that they could not get an appointment at a time that fit their schedules; or soon enough to meet their specific health care need.

Finally, transportation was shown as a frequent barrier to health care access. People with disabilities stated that:

- there was no transportation available;
- there were no accessible transportation options in their area; and/or
- their provider's office was too far away, requiring more travel time than they could manage.

Strategies to increase health care access

The literature showed that better training in communication for health care providers could be a useful strategy. People with disabilities reported that their health care provider's knowledge, attitude, and the attitude of clinic staff were very important factors in their accessing primary/preventive health care.

Recognition of the problem, or barrier, on the part of the provider could be an important strategy to increase health care access for people with disabilities, according to peer-reviewed literature. More specifically, people with disabilities described some of the most important areas of access when making a visit to a health care provider:

- having adequate parking designated for people with disabilities, including van-accessible spaces;
- having exam rooms and medical equipment that are accessible to people with disabilities, such as adjustable exam tables or scales that can weigh a person in a wheelchair;
- providing a restroom in the clinic that is fully accessible to a person with disabilities; and
- Providing entrances and exits in the clinic that allow simple and easy access.

For more information

Visit our website for more information on this and other RRTC: Health & Wellness projects aimed at promoting the health and wellness of people with disabilities. You can find information on making accessible printed materials (including alternate formats) as well as a checklist to determine how usable an outpatient clinic is for people with disabilities.

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