



Since its creation in 1997, the Special Olympics Health program has made life-changing and life-saving strides in health. Despite the success of the health program, people with intellectual disabilities (ID) remain one of the most medically underserved groups in the world. They are frequently locked out of most aspects of health systems and face significant health disparities. To improve the health outcomes for all people with ID and not just their athletes, in 2016 Special Olympics introduced a strategy: Inclusive Health.

So what are we talking about when we say Inclusive Health? Answers to frequently asked questions around inclusive health are below.

What is the problem?

People with intellectual disabilities (ID) have a higher prevalence of adverse health conditions, less access to health promotion programs, inadequate attention to care needs, and inadequate access to quality health care services. Systemic challenges exacerbate these disparities, including limited training of, and inadequate reimbursement for, providers. As a result, people with ID are often excluded from existing health care systems, and have inequitable opportunity for health. It is important to address and end these health disparities in a sustainable way.

What is inclusive health?

Inclusive health is the inclusion of those with ID in mainstream health policies and laws, programming, and services, training programs, research, and funding streams. Inclusive health means that no door is the wrong one for a person with ID to access health services and programs.

Why is inclusive health important?

Inclusive Health is founded on the idea that the health disparities faced by people with ID can be addressed by removing barriers and making the necessary accommodations to include people with ID in the mainstream health care system, health promotion, and public health efforts. Sustainable inclusive policies and practices can address, reduce and often eliminate many of these barriers. Inclusion allows for people with ID to take full advantage of the benefits of the same health programs and services experienced by people who do not have ID, resulting in improved health outcomes.

What are the types of barriers faced by people with ID accessing health services?

People with ID face a number of barriers in the health care and public health system. Common barriers include attitudinal barriers, communication barriers, policy barriers, programmatic barriers, social barriers, and physical barriers. More information and examples of these barriers are included in the Inclusive Health Principles and Strategies: How to make your Practices Inclusive of People with Intellectual Disabilities.

What are the key strategies my organization should use to work towards inclusive health?

Organizations across the public health system can take action to remove barriers and improve access for people with ID to their services, as their patients, customers, beneficiaries, and clients. Four primary strategies include:

- 1) Welcoming Spaces: Ensuring your programs and physical spaces are accessible and welcoming to people with ID.
- 2) Communication: Ensuring your communications, including written and spoken language, materials, and interactions with the community are accessible to people with ID.
- 3) Awareness and Training: Understanding your community and training your staff on the barriers and challenges faced by people with ID, including on how to remove them.
- 4) Sustainable and Intentional Inclusion: Building intentional and sustainable inclusion by changing organizational culture to value and understand inclusion.

More information on these strategies and tips for implementation are included in the Inclusive Health Principles and Strategies: How to make your Practices Inclusive of People with Intellectual Disabilities.

What are some examples of inclusive health practices, policies, and programs?

Inclusive health practices, policies, laws and programs help ensure that all people have equitable access to health and health services. The key for inclusive health is finding solutions that are matched to barriers. For example, if the barrier for a person with ID getting an eye exam is finding a healthcare provider who knows how to adapt the eye chart from letters to shapes, the solution may be finding a way to train providers to use adaptive screening tools. Or if the barrier to joining a fitness center is being able to complete the enrollment forms, the solution may be working with the fitness center to simplify their forms.

The following list outlines some of the ways in which your organization can work to make your health practices, policies, and programs more inclusive of people with ID.

- Integrate disability awareness and etiquette content into staff orientation and trainings
- Revise information/resources (pamphlets, brochures, etc.) to be at the appropriate literacy level for people with ID and print in a large, easy- to-read font
- Adapt health screening protocols or class instructions to be more accessible (e.g., use visual/pictorial instructions in addition to written instructions)
- Allow a personal aide or caregiver to attend wellness classes with a person with ID
- Simplify paperwork to ensure all registration/membership applications, health forms, and other paperwork use concise easy to understand language
- Provide adaptive equipment for people with different ability levels
- Incorporate disability, including ID, into organizational policies, statements, or mission, especially diversity statements.

How can I learn more about inclusive health?

Visit the Center for Inclusive Health at inclusivehealthcenter.org. This Center includes resources for any organization in the broader health system on how to take steps to make their health policies and practices inclusive of people with ID. Resources include: background on ID and inclusive health, practical information and strategies to help organizations take the first steps towards inclusive health, and emerging examples and solutions from other organizations.

Who should I contact with questions about or examples of inclusive health?

If you have any questions about inclusive health – or examples of emerging solutions to include on the Center for Inclusive Health – please contact us at inclusivehealth@specialolympics.org.