

## Disability in the United States

Approximately 1 in 5 or 20% of the United States population has a disability. Furthermore, the majority of Americans will experience a disability at some point during their lifetime. One in 20 (5%) of the nation's 53.9 million school-aged children have a disability according to a 2010 US Census report. Individuals with a disability have the right to participate fully in all facets of society, to have their differences respected, and to be free of discriminatory policies and practices. It is important to emphasize that people with disabilities experience the greatest health disparities compared to individuals without disability.

### **Health and Disability**

Individuals with disabilities are not immune from the obesity epidemic facing our nation. According to the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) more than one-third of adults in the United States are obese with annual related health costs estimated to be as high as \$147 billion a year. Obesity rates for adults and children with disabilities are 57% and 38% higher, respectively, than rates for adults and children without disabilities. The annual costs of health care attributable to obesity for individuals with disabilities are estimated to approach \$44 billion a year.

Individuals with disabilities face many obstacles to good health. Reasons for this health disparity vary, including a lack of nutritious food options, physical limitation, lack of accessible environments, lack of trained professionals, lack of resources, and other issues. Regardless of the causes, studies have shown that many individuals with disabilities are more likely than people without disabilities to report poorer overall health, physical inactivity and smoking, and less access to adequate health care.

All individuals need health care and a good health regimen to stay well and actively participate in the community. For an individual with a disability, understanding how to prevent illness and manage these secondary health conditions is an important part of healthy living.

### **The Power of Physical Activity and Sport**

Physical activity at all ages reduces risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Physically active children, including children with disabilities, are more likely to thrive academically and socially. Physically active children also learn how to incorporate safe and healthy activities into their lives. For adults, physical activity can reduce the risks of secondary health conditions as well as depression.

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published the *2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans* to provide information and guidance on the types and amounts of physical activity that provide substantial health benefits for all Americans aged 6 years and older. The report recognizes that one of the most important steps any individual can take to achieve better health is becoming physically active.

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### Did You Know?

The more you know about disability in the United States, the more prepared you are to address barriers and challenges facing individuals with disabilities.

- *Approximately 50 million people or 1 in 5 individuals reports having a disability.*
- *Obesity rates for adults and children with disabilities are 57% and 38% higher than adults and children without disabilities, respectively.*
- *29% of individuals with disabilities report unmet needs for health care services compared to 12% of people without disabilities.*
- *A 2008 Harris Interactive survey found that sports participants with disabilities are twice as likely to be employed as the general population of adults with disabilities (68% vs. 33%).*
- *University student-athletes with disabilities had a 92% employment rate upon graduation.*
- *Of all working-age people with disabilities, only 21% say that they are employed, compared to 59% of people without disabilities – a gap of 38%.*
- *National data indicate that approximately twice as many adults with a disability (25.6%) were physically inactive than adults without a disability (12.8%).*
- *Data from a Canadian national study comparing health risk behaviors of adolescents with physical disabilities to nondisabled adolescents found that physical inactivity was 4.5 times higher among disabled compared to nondisabled youth.*
- *Individuals with disabilities are more likely to be physically inactive (median: 22.4% vs. 11.9%) compared to people without disabilities (median: 11.9%).*
- *According to the Job Accommodation Network, Employer studies indicate that 56% of workplace accommodations are minimal up to \$500.*