

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities . . .

. . . Executive Summary

“Let us rededicate ourselves to the tasks ahead. Let the spirit of the National Decade of Disabled Persons capture our imagination. In partnership between the public and private sector, among national, state and local organizations and between the disabled and non-disabled we can win the battle for dignity, equality and increased economic opportunity for all Americans.”

President Ronald Reagan

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 5, 1984

Dear Mrs. Parrino:

Thank you for sending me a copy of "National Policy for Persons with Disabilities."

The fact that so much care was taken to include the concerns of handicapped individuals across America makes this a valuable document. It will provide us with the guidance needed as we chart our course through the Decade of the Disabled and beyond. We must all work together to make sure that people with disabilities achieve the greatest possible access to our society, find maximum independence, and have the opportunity to develop and use their capabilities.

I agree with you that "this nation is founded on the principle that each human life is sacred and inviolable. People with disabilities have an absolute right and responsibility to participate fully and equally in society and to maximize their quality of life potential in manners of their own choosing." There are still many barriers to be eliminated. Disincentives to productive employment must be replaced by incentives for disabled individuals to become independent and self-supporting whenever possible. Disabled people should have access to the best quality of life that our free nation has to offer.

The "National Policy for Persons with Disabilities" sets forth both short and long-term goals for our nation in a commendable manner. You can be sure that I will cooperate fully as we all seek the achievement of these goals.

Sincerely,

Ronald Reagan

Mrs. Sandra S. Parrino
Chairperson
National Council on the Handicapped
123 Marlborough Road
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The Process

The “National Policy for Persons with Disabilities” has been developed by the National Council on the Handicapped pursuant to its responsibility to provide policy advice in the area of disability. The statement was drafted with the participation of more than one thousand distinguished members of the disabled community, government, the service provider professions and the private sector. In addition to extensive mail, telephone and computer communication, drafting meetings were held in each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia.

The Challenge

“ . . . for I have promises to keep,
and miles to go before I sleep.”

. . . Robert Frost

For millions of Americans with disabilities, the magnificent principles and commitments set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution remain unfulfilled. The people of this great nation - - you and I - - have promises to keep.

It is estimated that more than 35 million Americans have physical, sensory, developmental, mental and/or emotional disabilities. During this Century there has been significant progress in the areas of medicine, education, rehabilitation, and access to social participation, and many persons with disabilities have achieved notable levels of personal success and productivity. However, the majority of disabled people still suffer the consequences of obsolete attitudes and practices. More than fifty percent of qualified Americans with disabilities are estimated to be unemployed; almost all who do have jobs are significantly underemployed. An estimated sixty percent of working age disabled adults live near or below the official poverty level. Significant social, educational, economic, physical communication and transportation barriers prevent a large percentage of individuals with disabilities from exercising their basic human rights. Too many of them are unable to reach their maximum levels of independence, productivity and quality of life. In some instances, persons with disabilities have been denied the nutrition and medical services needed to sustain life.

This situation is not only morally unacceptable, but also impacts negatively the economy and quality of life of every person in the nation. The remedial action set forth in this policy statement must be initiated without delay. Government, private sector organizations and all individuals must act now to keep the promises inherent in American democracy - - to ensure lives of independence, productivity and equitable mainstream social participation for all persons with disabilities.

Philosophical Foundation . . .

This nation is founded on the principle that each human life is sacred and inviolable; that all people” are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted . . .”

People with disabilities have an absolute right and responsibility to participate fully and equally in society and to maximize their quality of life potential in manners of their own choosing.

While the nation as a whole bears a responsibility to all its members, it is fundamental to the nature of human beings that initial responsibility for solutions to specific problems lies with each individual and/or his or her legal representative.

Government can and should provide guidance, coordinating mechanisms and assistance, and should ensure a process which will protect the basic human rights of individuals.

Productivity must be defined not only in terms of salaried employment and positive monetary balances, but also in the sense that individuals are maximizing their own quality of life potential and that of society.

Optimal solutions require individual initiatives by all persons and effective partnerships among individuals, families, communities, non-profit organizations, the private sector and government at all levels.

National Policy for Persons with Disabilities

It is the policy of the government of the United States to enable persons with disabilities to achieve their maximum quality of life potential, self-reliance, independence, productivity and equitable mainstream social participation in the most productive and least restrictive environment. Laws, regulations, policies and programs which make it possible for people with disabilities to fulfill these goals shall be initiated, funded, administered and promoted by government, the private sector and individuals.

1. **AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY:** Successful implementation of this policy will require strong leadership by the national government and the commitment, cooperation and active involvement of government at the state and local levels and of every member of our society.* The basic responsibility for such implementation lies with each individual citizen. While the majority of the necessary actions must be taken by government at the state and local levels, private sector organizations, families and individuals, the federal government has significant, continuous responsibilities to assure disabled people of all ages: equal exercise of their basic human rights; adequate and uniform services in all parts of the nation; and full and productive participation in the mainstream of society.
2. **RESPONSIBILITY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:** Persons with disabilities, to the maximum extent possible, must have the opportunity to take principal responsibility to solve their own problems and fulfill their potential. No people can achieve optimally productive and equitable mainstream participation in society until they are enabled to develop the necessary skills and allowed to make and execute their own decisions. Particular emphasis must be given to effecting maximal involvement of persons with disabilities in the planning and production of the programs which affect them and in the political and advocacy processes of the nation.
3. **EDUCATION:** Free and appropriate public education in the most productive and least restrictive environment shall be available to all disabled children and adults. All educational programs should be independence and productivity oriented and should be operated with profound respect for the dignity and basic human rights of the individual.

* Individuals; families civic, religious and other non-profit organizations; business, organized labor and other private sector entities; and government at all levels will, of course, share collective responsibility to achieve every program or goal set out or implied in this document. For the sake of brevity, this list has not been repeated in the presentation of each item, and has in some instances been shortened to “government and private sector.”

4. **ATTITUDES:** Obsolete attitudes are the basic cause of the great majority of the resolvable problems of disabled people. Realistic, positive perceptions of disability and affordable, productive approaches to the problems and potential of disabled people should be effectively communicated to all citizens by all educational media, including the mass communication media and the regular curriculum at all levels of public and private education.
5. **EMPLOYMENT:** Employment and other productive activity by individuals with disabilities should be effected in all major functions of society, particularly at policy-making and administrative levels, and in disability-related service programs.
6. **SINGLE POINT OF ENTRY:** A single point of entry for information, referral, advocacy and counseling should be available to all disabled people in every community. This entity should be responsible for offering to each disabled person comprehensive information in regard to an efficient, unbiased continuum of mainstream human services delivery systems. Such information service would be available to the client during the whole period of disability, including intervals when no services are sought or deemed necessary, or the disabling condition is inactive. The disabled person (or appropriate legal guardian) would have the right and responsibility to make final decisions in regard to the utilization or non-utilization of all services.
7. **LAW:** Federal, state and local governments have primary responsibility to guarantee, to expand and to vigorously enforce the rights of disabled people according to the letter and spirit of the United States Constitution and of all applicable laws and regulations. Congress should act forthwith to include persons with disabilities in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil and voting rights legislation and regulations. Disability related laws, regulations and enforcement procedures should be consistently reviewed, refined and improved in harmony with the public good and the developing situations of disabled people and our society, but always in ways that result in the expansion of the effective and socially responsible exercise of basic individual rights. In matters of fundamental human rights, there must be no retreat.
8. **ACCESSIBLE COMMUNITIES:** Government and the private sector shall encourage and cooperate with initiatives to enable all communities and services to become efficient, architecturally and communicatively accessible, and fully integrated. Disabled people have a basic human right to enjoy equal access to complete mainstream social participation, including the full use of public and private transportation, communication and all other community facilities.
9. **FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY:** Disability-related programs shall be conducted with fiscal responsibility and sound management principles.
10. **INDEPENDENCE INCENTIVES:** Disincentives to employment and to full social involvement shall be replaced by a comprehensive system of independence incentives and investments in the productivity of persons with disabilities. Disabled people have a basic human right to receive services and benefits which enable them to fulfill their potential to

participate productively and equally in the mainstream of society.

11. **RESEARCH:** Productivity, coordinated research in the area of disability and the development of efficient, cost effective, independence oriented technology and service delivery should be promoted, expanded, funded and made available for universal utilization by government and the private sector. Accurate demographic information in regard to disabled people and their needs should be developed and updated on a regular basis.
12. **PREVENTION:** All citizens should be encouraged and assisted in their efforts to prevent and to minimize the negative effects of primary and secondary disability. Each community, with the assistance of state and federal government, should establish programs in a systematic manner which identify objectives, strategies and timetables for reducing the incidence, prevalence and negative impact of disability by the application of preventive measures.
13. **COORDINATION:** Effective mechanisms to plan and coordinate government, private and voluntary disability-related activities should be developed at the federal, state and local levels.
14. **PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT:** Private sector involvement in the development of effective solutions for the special problems of disability should be encouraged and increased.
15. **VOLUNTEERS:** All persons, including people with disabilities and their private organizational and individual supporters, should be encouraged and assisted to participate on a non-paternalistic, voluntary basis in public and private efforts to enable disabled people to achieve their maximum quality of life potential.
16. **CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT SERVICES:** Government and the private sector shall develop, establish and support a counseling and independent living support services which serve as usable alternatives to long term care institutions and other traditional programs. Opportunities for basic health care and rehabilitation, and a broad range of affordable, independence and productivity oriented service options must be made available to every disabled person. An adequate number of qualified personnel should be trained at all levels to provide more effective services for disabled people. Guidelines for policy and program evaluation systems should be established for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of disability-related programs.
17. **MINORITIES AND SOCIAL GROUPS:** Government and the private sector shall examine the unmet needs of all segments of society and must cooperate to ensure that adequate services and opportunities are available to all disabled rural residents, women, Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, veterans and members of other social, racial and ethnic groups.
18. **INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION:** Government and the private sector should cooperate to support and learn from the efforts of the world's more than 500 million persons with disabilities as they strive to achieve maximum quality of life potential and equitable mainstream social participation.

Key Definitions

Person with a disability:

Any person with a physical, developmental, mental or emotional impairment which would substantially limit on or more major life activities such as learning, communication, mobility, self and health care, socialization, employment, housing, and recreation. This would include any individual who is so limited as a result of having a record of such an impairment or who is regarded as having such an impairment. Major areas of disability include but are not limited to: vision, hearing, sensory, mobility, respiratory and/or mental impairments; chronic and severe mental illness; learning disabilities; deafness; head trauma; chronic, disabling, life threatening and/or terminal illness; intractable pain; job related injuries; epilepsy; and substance abuse.

Independent Living:

Control over one's life based on the choice of acceptable options that minimize reliance on others in making decisions and in performing everyday activities.

Quality of Life:

Defined in terms of the unity of those values which are inherent in the basic nature of human beings and their inter-dependent society – values which are common to the mainstream of every culture. These are the values of survival and of the distinctive human spirit. They are the values of life and its perceived quality – food, shelter, health, education, social acceptance, economic security, personal freedom, recreation, aesthetic enjoyment and so forth.

Education, Habilitation and Rehabilitation

(Including vocational rehabilitation):

A continuum of services to assist not only in the mastery of traditional subject matter and the development and/or recovery of function and certain specific job skills, but also the development of all those intellectual, psychological, social and economic abilities which contribute to the maximum fulfillment of potential for productive independence and employment and to practical follow-up support in the process of obtaining and retaining employment and self-sufficiency.

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