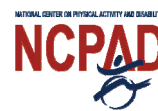


Addressing Barriers to Fitness and Recreation for Individuals with Disabilities



Federal Laws Regarding Access to Fitness and Recreation Facilities & Programs

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) require newly constructed commercial buildings or places of public accommodation (such as parks, playgrounds, restaurants, health clubs, museums, or federal buildings) or renovations or additions to these buildings to be accessible to people with disabilities and comply with federal accessibility design guidelines.

In addition, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Titles II and III of the ADA require programs and services to be accessible to people with disabilities. Programs and services provided by or funded by the Federal government, units of State and local governments, and places of public accommodation must provide people with disabilities equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the programs and services offered by that organization or facility.

The U.S. Access Board developed guidelines to help ensure newly constructed or renovated recreational facilities covered by the ADA are readily accessible and usable by people with disabilities. These guidelines are available online at (www.access-board.gov/recreation). They cover physical access to buildings and recreation environments. For assistance applying these guidelines to a recreational activity or facility, contact the National Center on Accessibility (www.ncaonline.org).

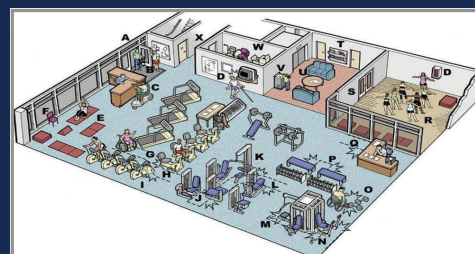
Common Barriers

- Transportation to and from programs or facilities,
- Economic factors (a program or membership fee is not affordable),
- Physical barriers that remain in facilities or building structures due to improper interpretation of building codes or non-compliance with guidelines, regulations, or laws,
- Inadequately trained staff who don't know how to work with, talk to, or help people with disabilities; this includes knowledge on how to adapt activities and how to market to these individuals,
- Lack of availability of accessible programs or other resources within a community,¹
- Poor social support. Parents, friends, and family must be positive about the individual's ability to participate in an activity and regularly encourage that participation.²



Resources for Addressing Facility Accessibility and ADA-Related Issues

The AIMFREE (Accessibility Instruments Measuring Fitness and Recreation Environments) Manuals are a series of questionnaires that can be used by persons with mobility limitations, fitness and recreation center staff, owners of fitness centers, and park district managers to assess the accessibility of recreation and fitness facilities.



NCPAD's Before and After Fitness Center Makeover is an interactive diagram that allows users to see how environmental barriers can be removed and accessible features can be incorporated into all areas of a fitness facility. This includes accessible doors and entryways, restrooms and locker rooms, appropriate signage and adaptive equipment.

The materials referenced above are available on the NCPAD website, www.ncpad.org.

Overcoming Barriers

- **Scan the landscape.** Ask the following:
 1. What existing resources are available? These may include public agencies or community based organizations that have the resources to help cover program or transportation costs.
 2. Do programs or facilities promote inclusion? Parents may be unaware of the opportunities that exist for their child. Facility managers or program planners may not realize the need for inclusive programming in the community. Always ask what's available or what people want.
- **Partner with other organizations.** A facility or agency in the community may be interested in sharing the cost and use of adaptive equipment or the services of a certified therapeutic recreation specialist (CTRS). Check to see if a local college or university offers a CTRS program and has students interested in an internship or part-time work.
- **Invest in staff training.** Ensure program and facility staff know how to communicate with people with disabilities in a respectful and reassuring manner. It is also important to have at least one staff member who can design and implement a program that includes all members or participants. In many instances, ensuring a person with a disability can fully participate in a program with individuals who do not have a disability may not require any special equipment; it may entail making a few simple adjustments.
- **Market appropriate programs and services.** Are you marketing your program or service in a manner that speaks to every potential facility member or program participant? Do your communication materials include images of people with disabilities being physically active? While walking is an easy and free or low-cost activity for the majority of Americans, there is a large percentage for whom it may be impossible or painful (for example, a person who is paralyzed, has arthritis, or is obese). Make sure your programs and materials suggest alternative activities for these individuals, such as seated exercises, swimming, or using a recumbent bike or handcycle.



References

1. Physical activity participation among persons with disabilities: barriers and facilitators. [Electronic fact sheet]. (2006). Chicago, IL: National Center on Physical Activity and Disability [Producer and Distributor]. Available from: www.ncpad.org/research/fact_sheet.php?sheet=280&view=all&print=yes. Accessed June 15, 2007.
2. Parental roles in facilitating and supporting an active lifestyle for a child with a disability. [Electronic fact sheet]. (2006). Chicago, IL: National Center on Physical Activity and Disability [Producer and Distributor]. Available from: www.ncpad.org/lifetime/fact_sheet.php?sheet=450&view=all. Accessed June 15, 2007.

For More Information:

The President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports
Voice: 202-690-9000
Online: www.fitness.gov

Learn More

North Carolina Office on Disability and Health: *Removing Barriers to Health Clubs and Fitness Facilities: A guide for accommodating all members, including people with disabilities and older adults.* Available for download at www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncodh

National Center on Accessibility: Resources to help parents and recreation professionals interested in recreation access for people with disabilities: www.ncaonline.org

US Access Board: Information to help understand and comply with federal accessibility laws and regulations: www.access-board.gov or (800)872-2253 (voice)/(800)993-2822 (TTY).

The National Center on Physical Activity & Disability
Voice and TTY: (800)900-8086
Online: www.ncpad.org