

BRIEFING ROOM

Fact Sheet: Advancing Disability Inclusive Democracy in the United States and Globally

DECEMBER 03, 2021 • STATEMENTS AND RELEASES

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed 31 years ago, it provided historic civil rights protections for disabled Americans. Grounded in the four core outcomes of full participation, equal opportunity, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency, the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in many contexts of American life: public accommodations, employment, transportation, and community living. However, Americans with disabilities still face barriers in fully participating in many aspects of their lives.

Today, on [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#), the United States is partnering with other governments, civil society, and experts across the globe to discuss disability inclusive democracy around the world. [This event](#), which is being co-hosted by Norway and the United Kingdom, is a part of the U.S. Summit for Democracy. The discussion will include how to improve the accessibility of voting, increase support for disabled political leaders, and expand civic engagement.

The Biden-Harris Administration has already taken a number of steps to develop a more disability inclusive democracy, including:

- **Appointing U.S. Special Advisor on International Disability Rights.** President Biden appointed Sara Minkara to be the U.S. Special Advisor on International Disability Rights. As the senior-level disability human rights position at the State Department, the Special Advisor leads the U.S. comprehensive strategy to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities internationally and across the Department. Special Advisor Minkara was sworn in on November 8, 2021.
- **Increasing Access to Democracy for Voters with Disabilities.** In March, President Biden signed Executive Order 14019 on Voting Access that takes significant steps to ensure disabled Americans can access key voting resources, requires an assessment of barriers to the right to vote independently and privately, and will help ensure that all Americans, including voters with disabilities, can exercise their right to vote.

- **Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Across the Federal Government.** In June, President Biden signed Executive Order 14035 advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) across the federal government. The Executive Order charges agencies with assessing their state of DEIA to eliminate barriers employees encounter. For federal workers with disabilities, the Executive Order sets a path for the federal government to become a model employer to improve accessibility, ensure accommodations can be requested, increase opportunities for advancement and hiring, and reduce physical accessibility barriers. On November 23, the Biden-Harris Administration released its [Strategic Plan to Advance DEIA in the Federal Workforce](#) to provide federal agencies a roadmap for implementation of the Executive Order.
- **Expanding Access and Inclusion for Disabled Americans.** The Biden-Harris Administration has taken [significant steps](#) to achieve a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable country for people with disabilities, including people with disabilities that experience multiple forms of discrimination and bias on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation and other factors. These steps include a focus on funding supporting economic self-sufficiency; advancing independent living through home- and community-based services and accessible, affordable housing; and improving access to services needed during the pandemic. Through quick policy action, the Administration has ensured disabled Americans are receiving resources and are included in key administrative proposals.
- **Developing Inclusive International Health Systems.** In early 2021, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched Learning, Acting, and Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS). This global project will support the development of health systems to respond to populations' growing needs for rehabilitation. Through this project, USAID will co-design and implement innovative, comprehensive, cost-effective interventions that strengthen health systems to provide rehabilitation services, including assistive technology.
- **Helping Individuals Cope with Challenges Posed by COVID-19.** In July, the Departments of Health and Human Services ([Office for Civil Rights](#) and [Administration for Community Living](#)), [Justice](#), [Education](#), and [Labor](#) provided guidance and information about where individuals with disabilities can access resources and accommodations and clarified their rights with regard to health and educational services and supports. USAID launched a [Distance Learning Toolkit](#), which provides guidance for designing a comprehensive distance learning strategy. These strategies can be implemented during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when learning institutions are

closed. They can also be implemented beyond crises, to increase and promote access to quality, equitable, and inclusive teaching and learning.

In the coming year, the Administration will take the following steps to create a more disability inclusive democracy:

- **Launching the Disability Inclusive Democracy Year of Action.** The year of action will explore innovative approaches and common challenges to promote disability-inclusive democracy globally. As part of the Summit for Democracy, on December 3, the United States is co-hosting an event with Norway and the United Kingdom that will bring together more than 100 leaders and experts across sectors to identify and discuss the most important issues in access to voting, elections, and political and civil participation. Building on the event, the year of action will lead to a “Disability Inclusive Democracy Action Plan” that lays out best practices and recommendations for the United States and our international partners. This framework will engage civil society, foreign governments, multilateral partners, and the private sector to promote equitable, inclusive, and accessible democratic principles and practices for more than one billion people with disabilities globally.
- **Focusing on Inclusive Climate Planning.** USAID announced the Disability Program Fund that is committed to supporting people with disabilities and their representative organizations in responding to climate change next year. Announced at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties, this initiative will bolster persons with disabilities’ resilience to the effects of climate change.
- **Announcing Partnerships to Improve Access.** USAID launched a partnership with ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, and is committing \$25 million towards the goal of providing 500 million people with life changing assistive products by 2030, including wheelchairs, eyeglasses, prosthetic devices, or hearing aids. This partnership will assist the more than one billion people in the world who utilize assistive technology or devices.
- **Committing to Inclusive Disability Policy.** President Biden’s Build Back Better Act invests in the caregiving economy, advances competitive integrated employment, and expands inclusive and accessible preschool and child care. Once enacted, the Build Back Better Act will provide significant investments to children and adults with disabilities to achieve independent living, economic self-sufficiency, equitable educational opportunities, and full participation in the workforce and in communities.

###