

THE 2008 DISABILITY POLICY SEMINAR

THE ARC, AAIDD, AUUCD,
UCP AND NACDD
FACT SHEET

HEALTH CARE

PROMOTING WELLNESS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 2007 (S. 1050/H.R. 32940)

Background

Hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities face barriers to health care. Medical offices may now be accessible, thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). However, the ADA does not require that medical equipment such as examination tables and chairs, other diagnostic equipment (x-ray, mammography, and other radiologic machines), and weight scales be accessible. These physical barriers can reduce the likelihood that persons with disabilities will receive timely and appropriate medical services. Often many people have had to forego critical medical screenings and tests altogether due to this lack of access.

People with developmental disabilities face significant barriers in accessing quality health care due to minimal or no training of medical students and physicians about treating this population. Moreover, the barriers people with developmental disabilities face in accessing any type of dental care are particularly acute across the country due to very low Medicaid reimbursement rates and lack of professional training for dental students and dentists. Many people with intellectual and developmental disabilities even go without basic preventative treatment – which often leads to costly infections, tooth loss, and subsequent nutrition problems.

As people with intellectual and developmental disabilities age, they face the same health issues that are found in the general population. Preventing secondary disabilities (such as arthritis) and maintaining wellness should be a priority, although few programs across the country offer these services.

Action Taken by Congress

Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) have introduced the Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2007 (S.1050/H.R. 3294) which:

- Requires the U.S. Access Board to establish access standards for all diagnostic equipment (examination tables, x-ray, mammography and other radiological equipment, etc.) commonly used by medical professionals;
- Increases the education of physicians and dentists by amending the Public Health Act to require that medical schools, dental schools, and their residency programs provide training to improve competency and clinical skills in providing care to patients with disabilities (including those with intellectual disabilities) as a condition of receiving federal funds; and

- Establishes a national wellness grant program which will authorize funding for programs or activities for smoking cessation, weight control, nutrition or fitness that are tailored to individuals with disabilities' needs and authorize funding for preventive health screening programs for individuals with disabilities to reduce the incidence of secondary conditions.

Recommendations

Co-sponsor the Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2007 (S.1050/H.R. 3294).

Relevant Committees

Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee

House Energy and Commerce Committee

House Ways and Means Committee

House Education and Labor Committee

For more information, please contact The Arc and United Cerebral Palsy Disability Policy Collaboration (202-783-2229), Association of University Centers on Disabilities (301-588-8252), American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (202-387-1968), or National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (703-739-4400).

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