

Aging and the ADA:

Why You Should Care About the Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law designed to protect people with disabilities from discrimination in several settings, including:

- Many workplaces
- All state and local government programs
- A wide variety of businesses



What is Disability?

The ADA's definition of disability is very broad, and includes a wide range of physical and mental impairments that "substantially limit" major life activities such as walking, speaking, seeing, breathing, learning, concentrating, interacting with others, caring for oneself, and many other physical and mental functions.

Many people think the ADA is all about building ramps and making buildings more accessible for people who use wheelchairs, but it's about much more than that!

Disability Often Comes with Age

Hearing and vision loss, arthritis, heart conditions, hypertension, diabetes, and dementia are common conditions that may develop or worsen as we age and lead to disability. Research indicates:

- Average life expectancy has increased dramatically in the last century, rising from only about 50 to nearly 77 years of age.¹
- Life expectancy for those who have reached adulthood is even greater; an individual who is 65 years old now has a good chance of reaching 85.²
- About 10% of young adults have disabilities; by the time people reach the age of 55, that percentage nearly triples, and by age 75 it increases more than five-fold.³

We are living longer than ever, and that means we are living longer *with disability*.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, *Health, United States, 2015* (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus15.pdf>)

² Social Security Administration, *The 2015 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds* (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/tr/2015/index.html>)

³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Americans with Disabilities: 2010* (<http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p70-131.pdf>)

ADA: Access and Accommodation

More and more people are working well past traditional retirement age, and remaining active in their communities well into their seventies and beyond. Because of the ADA, people may be entitled to reasonable accommodations in the workplace, or adjustments that enable them to participate in various community activities.

Examples of Workplace Accommodations:

- Equipment or devices to assist with lifting or other physical work duties
- Adjustments in schedules to accommodate medical appointments, treatments, or other disability-related needs
- Amplified telephones or assistive listening devices to accommodate hearing loss
- Making facilities more accessible or reserving parking spaces
- Magnification or screen reading technologies for individuals with vision loss using computers
- Adjustments in supervisory or communication methods to support workers with memory or cognitive impairments
- And many others!

Improving accessibility in buildings and facilities, making reasonable adjustments in policies, and providing supports for effective communication (assistive listening devices, large print materials, etc.) may also be needed so that people with disabilities can participate in state and local government programs or access the goods and services offered by private businesses.

For more information:

Mid-Atlantic ADA Center

www.ADAinfo.org

1-800-949-4232 (DC, DE, MD, PA, VA, WV)

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