

## Information about Disabilities

A disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as seeing, hearing, walking, learning or self-care. While some disabilities are apparent, or *visible*, the majority of people have *invisible* disabilities. While an invisible disability may not be apparent, the impact of the condition is real. Some individuals may be reluctant to disclose a disability because of the stigma associated with having a disability. The following is a list of some of the disability conditions served by Disability Services. It is important to note that individuals may experience multiple conditions.

### Psychiatric Disabilities

A psychiatric disability or mental illness is a health condition that impacts an individual's thinking, feelings, or behavior (or all three) and causes the individual distress and difficulty in functioning. The course of a mental illness is unique for each person and may limit one or more major life activities such as learning or working. Examples of a psychiatric disability include major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurological condition that affects learning and behavior. ADHD is the result of a chronic disturbance in the areas of the brain that regulate attention, impulse control, and executive functioning. Hyperactivity is not always a symptom. People with a formal diagnosis of ADHD may have difficulties with information processing and concentration. Individuals generally experience symptoms of ADHD in childhood and continue to experience symptoms as adults.

### Learning Disabilities

A Learning Disability (LD) affects the manner in which individuals acquire, store, organize, retrieve, manipulate, and express information. People who have been diagnosed with a learning disability typically have average to above average intelligence, but exhibit a discrepancy between ability and achievement. Areas affected by LD may include reading, written expression, and math. People with learning disabilities may also experience difficulty with organizational skills, time management, or social/interpersonal skills.

## Mobility Impairments

Mobility impairments include a broad range of disabilities that affect a person's independent movement and cause limited mobility. Some mobility impairments are acquired at birth while accidents, illnesses, or the natural process of aging may cause others. Examples of mobility impairments may include paraplegia, multiple sclerosis, quadriplegia, amputation, cerebral palsy, and arthritis. Depending on the severity of the disability, individuals may have limitations related to stamina, manual dexterity, speech, and ability to stand or sit.

## Systemic Disabilities

Systemic disabilities are medical conditions that affect one or more major body systems. These conditions constitute a disability if they significantly impact one or more major life activities, such as learning. The effects and symptoms of these conditions vary greatly; systemic conditions may include cancer, asthma, HIV/AIDS, epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome, or diabetes.

## Blind and Low Vision

Few individuals are totally blind; many individuals have some useful vision that can be utilized through the use of adaptive devices. Individuals are considered to be *legally blind* when they meet specific criterion for their vision loss. Someone has *low vision* when they have decreased visual acuity or visual field that cannot be corrected with ordinary eyeglasses, contact lenses, medical or surgical procedures.

Visual impairments may occur because of birth defects, inherited diseases, injuries, diabetes, glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, and other conditions. Some individuals may use Braille, large print, various assistive technologies, or a combination of these for communication purposes.

## Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The term *deaf* refers to those individuals who are unable to hear well enough to rely on their hearing and use it as a means of processing information. The term *hard of hearing* refers to those who have some hearing, are able to use it for communication purposes, and who feel reasonably comfortable doing so. Hearing loss is categorized by its severity as mild, moderate, severe, or profound and may affect the hearing in one or both ears. Modes of communication (American Sign Language, captioning, lip reading, assistive listening devices) vary depending on the degree of hearing loss and age of onset. Two people with the same severity of hearing loss may experience it quite differently.

## Deaf/Blind

This refers to a dual sensory loss that interferes with the ability of individuals to function effectively in the *hearing-sighted* world. This term does not necessarily mean total loss of hearing and vision; the range of hearing loss and vision loss varies with individuals. Please see additional descriptions on Deaf/Hard of Hearing and/or Blind/Low-Vision.

## Brain Injuries- Traumatic and Acquired Brain Injury

Some head injuries result in cognitive and behavioral impairments. A head injury may affect one or more of the following areas: information processing, memory, communication, motor skills, and other sensory, physical and psychosocial abilities. There is great variation among individuals in the impact of a head injury.

The brain can be damaged by an internal or external trauma to the brain. A brain injury may be caused by inflammation or swelling, bleeding, a blow to the head, or excessive force such as shaking or whiplash; these traumas may result in cognitive, physical, behavioral, and emotional changes. A brain injury can affect different areas of the brain depending on the type and severity of the accident; as a result, the effects vary widely from person to person. Major causes of brain injury include falls, motor vehicle accidents, violence, concussions, bicycle crashes, lack of oxygen from cardiac arrest, brain inflammation, aneurysms, strokes, and tumors.

## Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that is characterized by social interaction deficits, impaired communication skills, restricted interests, and **stereotyped** patterns of behavior. People with this disability may have difficulty with understanding social cues, breaks in routines, fine motor skills, stress management, and sensitivity to environmental stimuli. ASD may include high functioning autism, Asperger syndrome, or Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

## Reasonable Accommodations

The purpose of an accommodation is to remove barriers and allow people with disabilities an equal opportunity to demonstrate competency. Individual needs may vary, and because they vary, reasonable accommodations are determined on an individualized basis.