



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DISABILITY PREVENTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE PUBLIC HEALTH

Economic growth may not be relevant to meeting basic human needs of vulnerable populations.

A forum at the National Press Club called “Growth Strategies and Dynamics: Insights from Country Experiences” was presented by a Nobel Laureate in Economics. One of the people who responded to the paper was the former President of Harvard University and the Secretary of the U. S. Treasury.

Summary

The paper under discussion had a component that postulated poverty reduction is associated with economic growth. Poverty was viewed in economic terms, rather than measured human consequences of poverty. The U.S. has had a sustained economy that is by far the best in the world, but the well-being of its people lags far behind other countries. Thus, there is a disconnect between U.S. economic growth and health. Although the U.S. economy is the best in the world, it is 41st among other countries in infant mortality. Sweden, Japan and Iceland have rates of infant mortality that are half that of the U.S., and Beijing’s infant mortality rate is 4.6 per thousand compared to a rate of 6.5 per thousand in New York City.

Disability Prevention Issues

There is an economic assumption that “a rising economic tide lifts all boats.” This assumption may not apply to people with poor health and disabilities. For instance, during the late 1990s, when the economy was extremely strong in the U.S., people with disabilities lost ground as measured by earnings and employment opportunities. In periods of economic growth in the early 2000s there were dramatic rises for persons at 50% of poverty. Economic assumptions of the well-being of society may not be an element for meeting basic human needs of vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities and impoverished groups. Economic assumptions that leave people who are vulnerable behind may result in diminished health and disability.

Intervention

A letter was sent to the economic Nobel Laureate author of the “white paper” that discussed the application of economic growth to meeting the human needs of vulnerable populations, which, in turn, involved addressing public health issues that, if not addressed, can result in disability.

Recommendation

The primary focus of government policies must first provide for the safety and well-being of its people, which involves prevention of diminished health that can lead to disability.