



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS  
WITH DISABILITIES

## **PORTRAYAL OF DISABILITY BY MEDIA THAT IT IS RARE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PREVENTION OF DISABILITY**

*The media portrays disability as rare, but it is not. It afflicts 20% of the population and most families are affected by it.*

A forum was held on “The Media, The Economy and Workers” at the Center for American Progress (CAP). Presenters at the forum were staff from CAP, journalists, an authors of a book associated with low income families, and a representative from a labor union.

### **Summary**

Media coverage of events often masks the real circumstances of vulnerable populations. The forum addressed media portrayals that devalued workers and perpetuated stereotypes of persons in vulnerable groups. One of the misperceptions portrayed by media about disability is that it is rare. Such portrayal minimizes the need for fiscal resources to meet the human needs of people with disability. In reality, there are over 50 million persons with disabilities in America. Some examples of minimizing the prevalence of disability are under-counting of persons with mental illness when estimating the prevalence of disability and labeling of people with disabilities as “hard to serve” during the welfare reform debate.

### **Disability Prevention Issues**

Media promote the public perceptions that disability is rare to politically minimize fiscal costs for needed public health services such as health care, nutrition and housing. The media can also skew information about the human needs of people with disability and vulnerable populations through measures of central tendency that mask the reality of the human needs of vulnerable populations. If human needs of vulnerable populations are not transparent to the public, these needs through services may not be provided. The result may be diminished health that could lead to secondary disabling conditions.

### **Activity**

A letter was written to a presenter at the forum to provide examples of media distortion that minimize prevalence of disability.

### **Principle**

Efforts should be made to educate the public on accurate prevalence of disability.