



Disability Rights Laws: The ADA and Rehabilitation Act

Disability civil rights laws are crucial to protect the rights of people with disabilities. Despite the several decades that have passed since the introduction of the laws, people with disabilities continue to face barriers and discrimination. Disability rights laws establish precedent, to ensure that the rights of people with disabilities are safeguarded in all areas of life. Prior to the passage of these laws, people with disabilities were routinely denied access to public transportation, employment, education, services, and public businesses. These laws changed the landscape of the lives of Americans with disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The [Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) prohibits disability discrimination by programs conducted by federal agencies or those receiving federal financial assistance. It also prohibits employment discrimination in federal employment and by federal contractors. The law was the first of its kind and acted as a model for future laws, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. The law is comprised of sections that outline the requirements for different types of programs and entities. Section 504 applies to agencies and agency-funded programs and services, such as [housing](#), [health care](#), and [education](#). [Section 508](#) specifically requires electronic and information technology be accessible for people with disabilities. This is a pressing issue as more programs, services, and employee technology moves toward digital platforms. As a result, legislatures and agencies are evaluating how Section 504 and Section 508 can be strengthened and enforced.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) (ADA) prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, lodging, venues, services, and other public businesses. The purpose of the ADA is to ensure people with disabilities have the same opportunities as those without disabilities. The ADA has three main sections, known as titles. [Title I](#) applies to employment; [Title II](#) covers state and local government services, programs, and activities; and [Title III](#) applies to places of public accommodation, which are businesses and facilities open to the public. Some examples of disability discrimination are when buildings or services are physically inaccessible for people who use [mobility devices](#), when people with disabilities are refused employment because of their disability, when an entity fails to provide [communication aids and services](#), when people are denied housing or education because of their disability, or when entities do not provide [reasonable accommodations](#) so a person with a disability can use their service.

Despite the protections established under the ADA, people with disabilities continue to face barriers in all areas of public life. Some ongoing issues include:

- [Accessibility of websites and mobile apps](#) – entities are moving towards more digital platforms and technology; however, websites and apps are often not designed to be accessible for people who use screen readers, designs and fonts are difficult to read for people who are low-vision, or people with limited manual dexterity cannot navigate websites with a keyboard
- [Transportation](#) – rising modes of new transportation and infrastructure, like autonomous vehicles and electric vehicle charging stations, are not physically accessible for mobility device users
- [Health care](#) – many people are denied treatment and services just because they have a disability and many at-home equipment and tests are not accessible for people with sensory disabilities
- [Service animals](#) – service animal users are denied access to businesses and services, like rideshares and stores, solely because they need a service dog because of their disability
- [Physical accessibility](#) – despite the disability rights laws and physical accessibility standards being in place for decades, many businesses and public areas are still inaccessible for mobility device users

The Importance of Protecting Disability Civil Rights Laws

About [one in four adults](#) in the U.S. has a disability. Although disability rights laws are in place, the laws have faced numerous legal barriers and are underenforced. Proposed legislation and court cases sometimes challenge the efficacy and enforcement of the laws. Meanwhile, millions of people with disabilities continue to face discrimination and denied their established civil rights. The rights of people with disabilities must be protected and enforced so they can equally participate in all aspects of daily life as those without disabilities.

More information about the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD), CCD's mission, and CCD Task Forces and Co-Chair contact information can be accessed online at <https://www.c-c-d.org>.