

Advocacy

“...lack of knowledge by the public and governmental entities...and economic barriers such as the limitations on income earned while on SSI/SSDI that thoroughly discourages employment has left persons with disabilities the most discriminated against class in our society.” –

Survey Comment



What is the vision of the future for Advocacy?

Public Awareness & Accessibility

- Awareness of the needs of people with disabilities leads to greater accessibility, the removal of physical and attitudinal barriers.
- People with disabilities are actively included and respected as important members of the community.

Self-Advocacy

- A strong self-advocacy system for people with disabilities enables them to speak up for themselves, beginning at an early age.
- People with disabilities have safe places and support to learn to speak up for themselves.
- The right to make choices, express desires, and express opinions is valued and respected.
- Adults with disabilities assume leadership roles and are involved in policy development and cultural activities.

Advocacy

- There is unity in advocacy across agencies, types of disabilities, and across the lifespan.
- People without disabilities own their own biases and collaborate with individuals with disabilities without controlling them.
- Individuality is embraced.

Civic Engagement & Policy

- People with disabilities are knowledgeable about public policy issues and candidates running for public offices, and they vote.
- People with disabilities are involved in local government, participate in public forums, and are involved in decision-making processes.
- Public and court officials are educated and informed about people with disabilities, their rights, and their desires to be included.
- There is equality under the law and due process for all people with disabilities.

What are priorities for Advocacy?

The first priority in Advocacy is for the **choice, desires, and opinions of individuals to be valued and respected** (39%), followed closely by greater public awareness and accessibility (38%), and unity in advocacy across agencies, types of disabilities, and the lifespan (34%). Table 4 shows the total response.

Table 4: Priorities in Advocacy

Rank	Priority Statement	%Response
1	Choices, desires, and opinions valued and respected	39%
2	Greater public awareness and accessibility	38%
3	Unity in advocacy across agencies, types of disability, and lifespan	34%
4	Public and court officials know about disabilities	30%
5	Improved attitudes of advocates, working together without controlling	27%
5	Safe places and support to learn self-advocacy	26%
6	Strong self-advocacy system	26%
7	Involvement in local government, public forums, decision making	22%
8	Leadership roles in policy development and cultural activities	21%
9	Equality under the law and due process	20%
10	Participation in public policy and voting	11%
Total Respondents: 273		100%

Note: The number of respondents varies in the tables reporting prioritization results because participants were given the option to skip questions they chose not to answer.

What strategies were suggested for Advocacy?

Strategies for Public Awareness & Accessibility

- Use social media and other educational means for cultural change to promote respect and understanding of people with disabilities.
- Assist development of health networks in rural areas to integrate services.
- Work on moving away from the negative and deceptive label “disabled” which sets people up to be in a “have not” category.
- Look for national leaders among people with disabilities to act as spokespersons working to change prejudiced opinions.
- Help the public to recognize and respect invisible disabilities.

Strategies for Self-Advocacy

- Ensure people have a voice in developing their plans (Individualized Education Program-IEP, Plan of care, treatment plan...etc.).
- Foster support networks such as Peer Power, Partners in Policymaking, and People First.
- Use social media to advocate and teach appropriate ways to respond to cyber bullying and other bullying behavior.
- Teach self-advocacy skills, starting from an early age. Ideas:
 - Include it in the IEP, parent-teacher conferences, and team meetings
 - Use a self-advocacy curriculum in school including resources/tools
 - Teach people how to speak up for oneself
 - Allow risk taking and learning from mistakes
 - Provide opportunities to build self-esteem and confidence
 - Help people learn about their disability, strengths, and needs
 - Educate about disclosure (benefits, drawbacks, when to disclose)
 - Teach people how to listen
 - Use role-play to teach people how to be a self-advocate

Strategies for Advocacy

- Make resources, tools, and education available to promote advocacy and self-advocacy for others.
- Train families and staff to support self-advocacy and keep the individual's beliefs and values in the forefront.
- Facilitate opportunities to self-advocate and celebrate everyday self-advocacy successes for individuals of all ages.
- Build relationships between seniors (e.g., AARP, Senior Centers) and people who experience a variety of disabilities (e.g., Brain Injury Network, physical disabilities) to advocate for government policies, funding, resources, and services.
- Provide incentives to family members and care providers to get involved in advocacy groups.

Strategies for Civic Engagement & Policy

- Conduct targeted advocacy to policy makers.
- Provide opportunities to learn about public policy issues and political candidates, attending political forums and town-hall meetings.
- Provide more resources for senior advocacy groups and organizations.
- Increase resources and assistance for filing complaints, and legal actions to enforce existing laws and regulations.
- Advocate for more non-partisan legislation and public policy that address issues related to housing and employment, equal accessibility in society and in the workplace.