



Call to Action Inclusive Fitness Coalition

An Emerging National Priority: Health/Fitness Promotion for People with Disabilities and Activity Limitations

The most recent U.S. Census estimates there are approximately 50 million people with disabilities. Despite growing evidence that persons with higher levels of physical fitness have a reduced risk of various chronic conditions (e.g. type 2 diabetes, stroke, coronary heart disease) and are more physically independent in later life, people with disabilities continue to engage in higher rates of sedentary behavior, have significantly lower levels of physical fitness, and have a thinner margin of health compared to the general population. This increases the likelihood that, as they age, they will have greater difficulty maintaining their ability to work, participating in recreational activities, and performing self-care activities. As a result, they are also more likely to experience lowered self-esteem and to perceive themselves as having a reduced quality of life. Beyond these impacts on the individual, there is an impact on society through higher health care costs and a greater strain on the national health care budget.

The benefits of at least moderate levels of physical activity may be even more important for people with disabilities, as issues of environmental access and reduced employment opportunities combine to produce a far greater likelihood of living a sedentary lifestyle. There is compelling evidence that physical activity helps people with disabilities lead more independent and productive lives while reducing their risk of developing a variety of potentially serious secondary conditions including obesity, deconditioning, fatigue, and social isolation.

Low Physical Activity Participation among People with Disabilities

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention planning document *Healthy People 2010* reports that 56 percent of people with disabilities reported *no leisure-time physical activity*, and only 23 percent are physically active for at least 30 minutes a day three or more times per week. This is a strikingly higher number than what has been reported for people without disabilities and is considered a major health disparity in this underserved segment of the population.

Poor Access to Fitness and Recreation Facilities and Programs

People with disabilities continue to be excluded from health promotion and fitness because of the barriers they experience getting *to* and *into* facilities, finding accessible exercise equipment and programs, and locating an affordable professional trainer or instructor who knows something about their disability. Yet, this is precisely the audience who should be members of gyms and fitness facilities because outdoor activities such as jogging and

walking – easily accessible to most people – present major barriers to individuals who are unable to perform these activities (such as people who use wheelchairs or people with balance impairments).

Mission of the Inclusive Fitness Coalition (IFC)

The mission of the Inclusive Fitness Coalition is to facilitate an expanded coordination of organizations and individuals to address the complexity of personal, social, cultural, political, and economic factors that influence – positively or negatively – the participation of people with disabilities in physical activity, fitness, sports, and recreation. The IFC is charged with promoting equitable access to, and safe use of, fitness and recreational equipment, facilities, and programs, to help reduce debilitating secondary conditions associated with disability and a sedentary lifestyle.

The IFC will fulfill its mission by achieving the following goals:

- Increasing inclusion, accessibility, receptiveness, and responsiveness in all areas of physical activity, fitness, exercise, sports, recreation, and physical education for people with disabilities;
 - Examples: Accessible environments, equipment, and programs at health clubs;
- Developing and advocating for governmental, institutional, organizational and other policy measures and changes that will support the objectives of the Coalition;
 - Examples: Subsidized fitness memberships for people with disabilities;
- Enhancing professional and career development through education and training for individuals dedicated to the areas of physical activity, fitness, exercise, sports, recreation, and physical education for people with disabilities;
- Enhancing health care provider relationships for people with disabilities through education and training of providers in areas of physical activity and disability;
- Recognizing good practices currently being done by organizations already dedicated to similar causes of the IFC;
- Encouraging support in research and program development in all areas of physical activity, fitness, exercise, sports, recreation, and physical education;
- Helping combine existing human, informational, and financial resources to create unique success and achievements in providing greater access to physical activity among people with disabilities;
- Supporting research and development in exercise and recreational technologies.