Timeline

National Disability Employment Awareness Month each October recognizes the societal and workforce contributions of people with disabilities. Congress designated in 1945 the first “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week”; the word “physically” was removed in 1962 to allow for the inclusion of all Americans with disabilities. In 1988, the week was extended to a month and its name changed to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.”

1753 Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia is first hospital with ward to treat mental illness

1773 Virginia establishes first hospital solely for treatment of “idiots, lunatics and other people of unsound mind,” the Public Hospital for Persons of Insane and Disordered Mind, now Eastern State Hospital

1776 Stephen Hopkins, who has cerebral palsy, signs the Declaration of Independence, saying, “My hands tremble, but my heart does not”

1805 Dr. Benjamin Rush, considered the father of American psychiatry, publishes Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind

1817 American School for the Deaf opens in Connecticut. American Sign Language originates here

1829 Louis Braille publishes his eponymous raised-dot alphabet

1832 Perkins School for the Blind opens in Massachusetts

1841 Activist Dorothea Dix begins her crusade on behalf of mentally ill people, leading to the first state-run mental hospitals

1848 Massachusetts School for Idiotic Children (now the Walter E. Fernald Developmental Center) opens

1860 British physician William Little first identifies cerebral palsy

1866 British physician John Langdon Down publishes first description of Down syndrome

1869 First wheelchair patent is issued in United States

1880 National Association for the Deaf is founded

1907 Indiana becomes the first state to pass a eugenics law, to sterilize “confirmed idiots, imbeciles and rapists” in state institutions. Similar laws are adopted by 31 other states

1918 Soldiers Rehabilitation Act provides job training for returning World War I veterans with disabilities

1924 Helen Keller graduates from Radcliffe College, becoming the first deaf blind person to earn a bachelor's degree

1927 In Buck v. Bell, Supreme Court rules that forced sterilization of people with disabilities is not a violation of 14th Amendment

1933 Franklin Roosevelt, who is paralyzed from the waist down by polio, becomes President. Accounts differ as to the extent he went to hide his disability

1935 Social Security Act provides funds to each state to assist, among others, the blind and “crippled” children

1943 Dr. Leo Kanner becomes first person to clearly define autism

1949 United Cerebral Palsy is founded

1956 Disability Insurance program is added to Social Security

1960 First Paralympic Games held in Rome

1961 Making Buildings Accessible to and Usable by the Physically Handicapped is published. Forty-nine states adopt accessibility legislation by 1973

1962 Eunice Kennedy Shriver starts a day camp that will become Special Olympics
### 1962
Ed Roberts, who has polio, enrolls at the University of California, Berkeley. He is considered the father of the Independent Living movement.

### 1964
Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity or national origin, but does not include disability.

### 1965
Medicaid program is established to cover healthcare costs for people with disabilities.

### 1965
Autism Society of America is founded.

### 1970
Judy Heumann successfully sues the New York City Board of Education when her application for a teaching license is denied because her wheelchair is deemed a fire hazard.

### 1973
Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits public institutions that receive any federal funds to discriminate on the basis of disability.

### 1975
Education for All Handicapped Children Act requires public schools that accept federal funding to provide equal access to education for children with disabilities.

### 1976
U.S. Representative Barbara Jordan (D-Texas), diagnosed three years earlier with multiple sclerosis, becomes the first Black woman to deliver the keynote address at a national political convention.

### 1976
Amendment to Higher Education Act of 1972 mandates services for college students with physical disabilities.

### 1978
National Council on Disability is founded in Department of Education.

### 1981

### 1984
Voting Accessibility for Elderly and Handicapped Act requires polling places to be accessible to people with disabilities for federal elections.

### 1990
President Bush signs the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), which guarantees access to and prohibits discrimination against individuals with “physical or mental disabilities”.

### 1992
United Nations establishes Dec. 3 as International Day of Disabled Persons. In 2007 the name was changed to International Day of Persons With Disabilities.

### 1998
Federal judge rules that golfer Casey Martin, who has a circulatory disorder, may use a cart to compete on the PGA Tour.

### 2000
President Clinton signs Executive Order 13163, calling for federal government to hire 100,000 people with disabilities over next five years. Few steps are taken to implement the order, forcing President Obama to sign another executive order in 2010 requiring compliance.

### 2001
Congress creates the Office of Disability Employment Policy in Department of Labor.

### 2004
Chicago hosts first Disability Pride Parade.

### 2006
West Virginia passes bill requiring disability history to be taught in public schools during state’s annual Disability History Week.

### 2008
ADA Amendments Act grants broader protections to workers with disabilities.

### 2009
Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act prohibits employers from using genetic information to discriminate against employees or job applicants.

### 2011
Revised ADA regulations adopt 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design and address other accessibility issues, including accommodating service animals, wheelchairs and other mobility devices.

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