

WHY FUND DISABILITY RIGHTS AND DISABILITY JUSTICE?

What Funders Need to Know

Disability is a natural part of the human experience. Disabled people are part of the beautiful threads of diversity woven throughout our world. It's important to recognize that disability is, for so many, a celebrated identity connected to a vibrant history, culture, and community.

Disabled people are artists, creators, thinkers, innovators, and changemakers.

More than 61 million people in the United States have a disability. Globally, the population of disabled people totals over 1 billion. As these numbers continue to grow due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, so do the inequities that people with disabilities experience.

- Disability cuts across class, gender, race, and ethnicity, and disproportionately affects people living in poverty, women, and people of color.
- Disability can be lifelong or acquired and may be an outcome of climate change, systemic violence, racism, forced migration, and poverty.
- Disabled people regularly encounter ableism, a form of discrimination that often compounds other systems of oppression to create tremendous barriers to opportunity for people of color, LGBTQ+ people, and other people with historically excluded identities.

The message is clear and urgent: funders must incorporate disability if they are committed to furthering a thriving, just, equitable society.

Data reveals that just 2% of philanthropic funding supports disability, including mental health and substance use, with most of the funding going for services and supports. And funding for disability rights and social justice that aims at systemic change is even smaller: just 1 penny of every 10 US foundation dollars.¹



¹ [Foundation Giving for Disability Priorities and Trends Report](#)

Philanthropy must shift the paradigm of a lack of funding for disability, because every social justice issue is a disability issue. Consider the following examples:

- **Health Equity:** "People with disabilities face higher healthcare needs, more barriers to accessing services, and less health coverage, resulting in worse health outcomes."²
- **Climate Change:** People with disabilities are more at risk in the case of disasters due to 1) a lack of access to education, 2) existing health conditions, and 3) difficulty evacuating safely.³
- **Transportation:** 3.6 million Americans with disabilities do not leave their homes and are excluded from work, education, and other opportunities due to inaccessible transportation infrastructure because they are disabled or housebound.⁴
- **Education:** Students with disabilities are at significantly greater risk of suspension from school or referrals to law enforcement. Nationally, among secondary students eligible for special education, 24% of Black students, 15% of Native American students, and 11% of White students were suspended from school at least once in 2017-18.⁵

With intentional action, funders can move communities toward equity for disabled people by incorporating disability into all aspects of their grantmaking and investing in systemic change led by disabled people.

2 [The Missing Billion: Access to Health Services for 1 Billion People with Disabilities](#), The Missing Billion (PDF)

3 [How climate change disproportionately impacts those with disabilities](#), United Nations Environment Programme

4 [Travel Patterns of American Adults with Disabilities](#), U.S. Department of Transportation (PDF)

5 [Disabling Inequity: The Urgent Need for Race-Conscious Resource Remedies](#), The Civil Rights Project

**Join us on the
journey to a more
disability-inclusive
philanthropic sector.**

Join the Disability & Philanthropy Forum's community of leaders committed to centering the perspectives of disabled people. Together, we are on a collective journey to advance disability inclusion as key to social justice. Learn more and sign up for membership at DisabilityPhilanthropy.org