

Striving for inclusive health for people with intellectual disabilities, which means equitable access to quality health care, education, and services throughout communities.



## Why is it Important to Sustain Inclusion Efforts?

Inclusion benefits everyone. Inclusion is not only a matter of social justice but also impacts costs to society. Sometimes people with intellectual disabilities (ID) don't have access to health services, but other times they receive separate, parallel services, which are often costly and ultimately unsustainable efforts. Inclusive health allows for people with ID to take full advantage of the benefits of the same health programs and services experienced by people who do not have ID. Sustainable inclusion efforts also lower the costs to organizations providing services to the community and ultimately lower health costs for our society.

Sustaining inclusive efforts are just as important as creating them. Being inclusive isn't about checking off items on a list, but an ongoing process to better serve our communities, including people with ID. What do you do when funding for a project has ended? Do you simply suspend services in the community? How can you hold both yourself and organization accountable in your inclusive efforts so that regardless if a program has been eliminated due to lack of funding, people with ID are still being included?

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## List of Tips to Sustain Effort

*Below are tips to sustaining your inclusion efforts, as well as examples from organizations that have successfully integrated and sustained the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities into their organizations' efforts.*

- 1. EMBED INCLUSION INTO EXISTING WORK:** Embed inclusion into your existing work by looking for areas where you can build on to include people with ID. For example, including people with ID in a tobacco cessation program or nutrition class, rather than having a separate program for people with ID. Additionally, you might want to consider looking at other programs within your organization that reach out to diverse communities and ensure that inclusion is embedded within those.
- 2. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS:** Reach out to organizations that serve the same communities as you, even if they are in a different field or sector. Think about how your work can complement and leverage one another's. Various organizations throughout the community (self-advocacy organizations, local health clinics, schools, community recreation centers) provide services to people with ID; consider connecting with those organizations and explore areas for potential collaborations. This can be an opportunity to create diverse partnerships, exchange resources, broaden the reach of each other's efforts, address challenges together, and limit duplication.
- 3. MODEL INCLUSION IN YOUR ORGANIZATION:** Sustainability is more than just ensuring people with ID are included. Think about your organization's mission statement or vision; is inclusion deliberately mentioned or implied? How inclusive is your organization? Sustainability also entails integrating intentional inclusion and diversity within your organization. Do you have a representation of individuals from diverse racial, socioeconomic, disability and/or other cultural backgrounds involved in your advisory board?
- 4. COMMUNICATION IS KEY:** Reach out to policymakers, both locally and statewide. Express to them the importance and benefits of inclusion is not just for people with ID but the entire community, and to consider implementing inclusion efforts into policies. Also, consider sharing progress and outcomes with partners, key stakeholders, community leaders, and most importantly individuals with ID in the community. This can help build trust in the community of people with ID. This is something not many communities, regardless of ability, get a chance to partake in. This type of open communication and chance for involvement and feedback strengthens communities as well as improves organizations' abilities to provide services to the community.

## Examples From The Field

*Throughout the years, organizations have begun embedding inclusion into their work in order to better serve their communities, ensure sustainability, and lower costs over time by not having separate programs. Below are examples from the field.*

**State-Based Disability & Health Program** : The Disability and Health Program (DHP) within the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) initiated a policy change to ensure public health programs are integrating the needs of people with disabilities into statewide and local initiatives. In 2009 DHP developed an Inclusion Policy which requires applicants seeking funding to incorporate strategies to ensure people with disabilities are integrated.

**Nutrition is for Everyone** : The goal of Nutrition is for Everyone is to implement nutrition education interventions, including direct training for people with disability and community members in states which have the lowest consumption of fruits and vegetables for people with disabilities. The program currently has Nutrition Ambassadors located locally in Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi and Tennessee. With minimal funding, these Nutrition Ambassadors were able to leverage additional support from local community organizations to assist in the sustainability of the program and continue the inclusion of people with ID in nutritional health programs.

**Ohio Disability and Health Program Tobacco Program** : Ohio Disability and Health Program partnered with the Centers for Independent Living to implement an 8-session tobacco cessation program adapted for people with disabilities called the Living Independent from Tobacco program. The program, which has been implemented across the state, embodies a behavioral counseling approach toward educating consumers on the benefits of quitting and methods of managing cravings and lifestyle changes.

## Additional Resources

The resources below provide a great deal of information on organizations sustaining inclusion efforts. Some of these resources may not directly apply to ID or focus on health promotion; however, they provide sustainability tips that you can use and apply to your own organization.

- Shirley Engelmeier, April 2015, [Sustaining Diversity—An Inclusive Leader’s Job is Never Done!](#)
- The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion, Sarika S. Gupta, January 2011, [Policy Brief: Strategies to Facilitate and Sustain the Inclusion of Young Children with Disabilities](#)
- [Practical Playbook, Sustain Your Project](#)

<sup>1</sup> New York State Department of Health. Serving the Needs of People with Disabilities Through Policy Change. [State-Based Disability & Health Program](#)

<sup>2</sup> Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD). Nutrition is for Everyone Newsletters [Nutrition is for Everyone](#)

<sup>3</sup> Association of University Centers on Disabilities 360: News from Around the Network (September 2017). Nutrition Efforts Reaching the Disability Community [Nutrition Efforts Reaching the Disability Community](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Ohio Disability and Health Program](#)