# INTRODUCTION LETTER FROM JOEY MIER

*Dear Reader,*

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. It means a great deal to me and to my fellow athletes to know that you are willing to listen to stories and experiences that are too often overlooked. At its heart, health equity begins with something simple but powerful: seeing the person, not simply the patient.

My name is Joey Mier, and I am a proud Special Olympics Wisconsin athlete. I have been a part of Special Olympics for more than 24 years. Special Olympics is my family and my passion, and my experiences have shown me what it truly means to be seen, heard, supported, and included.

Health equity is not an abstract concept. It is personal. It is about whether people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are listened to, understood, respected, and included in decisions about our own health and well-being.

My own experiences have shown me that the health care system can be difficult to navigate for anyone, and even more challenging for people with IDD. My disability is invisible, and there have been times when I have felt misunderstood, rushed, or treated as a number rather than a person. At times, these experiences have made me reluctant to seek care because I do not feel confident that providers understand me or my needs. Imagine needing to ask for help but not knowing how to ask for it or wondering whether you will be understood when you do.



During my annual eye exam, I picked out a pair of frames that I thought Medicaid would cover. No one explained to me in a way I could understand that the frames cost more than what Medicaid covered or that I would have to pay the difference. Later, I received a large bill that I could not afford. The experience was frustrating and caused me anxiety. It showed me how confusing health care costs and insurance coverage can be, and how important it is for people with IDD to have information explained clearly and accessibly.

## INTRODUCTION LETTER FROM JOEY MIER

The following year, I went to Special Olympics Opening Eyes, the vision screening discipline of Healthy Athletes. There, I received a full vision screening and a free pair of eyeglasses. The experience was completely different. I felt comfortable, supported, and included. What had once been frustrating and anxiety-inducing became a positive experience, showing me the difference that clear communication, understanding, and genuine support can make in health care.

Special Olympics has shown me what is possible when health providers have education, understanding, empathy, compassion, and most importantly, a willingness to listen to people with IDD about our own experiences. I hope this report reminds you that we can't live happily if we're not healthy. Health is about more than just getting medication or receiving treatment. People with IDD deserve the opportunity to live healthy, fulfilling lives. We deserve to have our questions answered, our choices respected, and our experiences taken seriously. Health equity begins when we see the whole person and listen to what that person has to say. And that starts with you.

Live with kindness,



*Joey Mier*
*Special Olympics Wisconsin*
*Athlete Leadership Council Member & Health Messenger*