

“Confined to a Wheelchair”

“Invalid”

“Disabled”

“Stroke Victim”

These terms paint a picture of incapacity and inability when they are used to describe people with disabilities. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to change the way people with disabilities are viewed. Efforts continue in Michigan to promote the independence, abilities, competency and talents of people with disabilities.

The Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns, in collaboration with community partners, has compiled a list of appropriate terms and acceptable alternatives to use when writing or talking about people with physical or mental disabilities.

We can help put an end to discrimination by paying more attention to how we communicate and help reduce the 70 percent unemployment rate among people with significant disabilities. Together, we can change what it means to be a person with a disability in America by promoting independence through equality.

MICHIGAN COMMISSION ON DISABILITY CONCERNS

The Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns serves as an advocate and information resource for the state’s 1.7 million people with disabilities. The commission’s mission is to achieve full participation, choice and self-determination for each individual with a disability in a way that promotes awareness of disability issues. The commission values equity, dignity and diversity consistent with the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act.



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What’s in a Name?



TERMS TO USE WHEN WRITING OR TALKING ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

APPROPRIATE TERMS are listed first, immediately followed by the
INAPPROPRIATE TERMS they replace.

- Person with a disability
Disabled person, cripple, abnormal, cripp, gimp
 - Person who has mental or physical disabilities
Disabled victim, unfortunate victim, poor, pitiful, abnormal, deformed, invalid
 - Person without a disability
Normal, complete, whole
 - Person who has a mobility impairment, wheelchair user, or person who uses a wheelchair
Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair victim
 - Person with quadriplegia, paraplegia, person who is paralyzed, or person who uses a wheelchair
Quad, quadriplegic, paraplegic
 - Person who uses crutches or cane or other mobility device
Cripple, gimp
 - “Person who has ...,” “Person who experienced ...,” “Person with ...”
Victim of, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with ...
 - Person who has a disability, resulting from or caused by ...
Invalid, victim, afflicted with ...
 - Person who has had a stroke
Stroke victim, suffered from a stroke
 - Person with a congenital characteristic or a congenital disability
Birth defect
 - Person with mental illness or disability, psychiatric disability
Mental deviant, crazy, mentally deranged, insane, former mental patient
 - Person with mental retardation or person with cognitive disability
Retard, mentally retarded person, feeble-minded, mentally deficient, defective, imbecile, idiot
 - Person with a brain injury
Brain damaged, brain injured victim
 - Person with a closed head injury
Closed head injured victim
 - Person with arthritis
The arthritic
 - Person who has epilepsy
The epileptic
 - Person who has a speech disorder, a person without speech, or a person with a speech impairment
Mute
 - Person of short stature, dwarf, little person
Midget
 - Person who is deaf or hard of hearing; deaf person; Deaf person*; hard of hearing person; deaf and hard of hearing people; deaf; hard of hearing
Deaf mute, deaf and dumb, hearing impaired, deaf and hearing impaired, the deaf, hearing disabled, communicatively impaired
- * Capitalized “D” means Deaf people who are part of Deaf culture.
- Person who is blind, person with a visual impairment
Blink, blur, squint, bluff
 - Person with Down syndrome
Mongoloid, Down
 - Person with cerebral palsy
Palsied, spastic, spas
 - Person with learning disabilities
Retard, lazy, stupid
 - Person with a developmental disability
Developmentally disabled person

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Acknowledges the person first,
rather than the disability
(e.g., person with a disability)