

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/the-first-ever-world-report-on-disability>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

According to [a new report](#) jointly prepared by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, more than a billion people about 15 percent of the world's population are estimated to live with some form of disability. While this number may seem larger than our everyday experience of people with disabilities suggests, disability manifests in diverse ways.

For instance, many of us experience temporary disabilities ranging from broken arms to sprained ankles to hearing loss after a particularly loud rock concert. Additionally, many of us also live with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Of course, there are also people who have experienced a disability from birth or have family and loved ones who live with life-long disabilities. Yet, because we tend to fall back on a few limited stereotypes of people with disabilities, we often exclude ourselves from the category of having a disability. In fact, disability affects most of us, in some way shape or form, something the World Report on Disability, the first ever report of its kind, astutely points out.

In the years ahead, meeting the needs of those with disabilities will become an even greater concern for our social, health, and justice systems, as the prevalence of disability is on the rise. One factor contributing to the rising rates of disability is age; as people age they experience more chronic health conditions. Beginning this year, baby boomers start turning 65 at the rate of 10,000 people every day and will continue to do so for the next 20 years. According to the Alliance for Aging Research, by 2030 almost one out of every five Americans, some 72 million people, will be 65 years or older. Our rapidly aging population and the subsequent impact on social, health, and justice systems has been dubbed the silver tsunami.

Understanding the sheer number of people who experiences disabilities is important because people with disabilities rely on our social, health, and justice systems, all of which possess barriers to their services that make them inaccessible for people with disabilities. The World Report on Disability details barriers such as negative attitudes, lack of services, lack of accessibility, and lack of research focusing on people with disabilities.

As [Vera's Accessing Safety Initiative](#) has learned since 2005, many of the barriers people with disabilities experience are avoidable. The report provides recommendations for overcoming these barriers, including enabling access to all mainstream systems and services, adopting a national strategy and plan of action, involving people with disabilities in this planning, and strengthening and supporting research on disability. Whether you are a person with disability, experience a temporary disability, support your aging loved ones, or are already working to improve access to social and justice systems for people with disabilities, the findings of this report are relevant to us all.

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