

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Passed by Congress in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is the nation's first comprehensive civil rights law addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. The ADA prohibits discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications. Federal legislation to protect civil rights initially focused on the prevention of racial discrimination, and the impetus for the ADA grew out of the civil rights movement. Having seen the federal government involve itself in protecting racial minorities, advocates began to agitate for the protection of people with disabilities.

The ADA was built on earlier legislative successes. In 1988, the Fair Housing Act was amended to add people with disabilities. In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act prohibited discrimination against someone with a disability by anyone receiving federal assistance, though it did not address discrimination by employers, public accommodations in the private sector, publicly funded programs or those providing federal financial assistance. Coverage for all disabilities did not take place until the passage of the ADA.

The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and local government services, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation. It also mandates the establishment of TDD/telephone relay services. The ADA was originally enacted in public law format and later rearranged and published in the United States Code.

Disability Prevalence in Massachusetts and the U.S.

- In 2013, there were 6,613,654 individuals ages 18-64 living in the community in Massachusetts, of which 782,204 were individuals with disabilities, a prevalence rate of 11.8%.
 - In 2013, there were 314,746,745 individuals ages 18-64 living in the community in the U.S., of which 39,892,960 were individuals with disabilities—a prevalence rate of 12.7%.
- For more information on the ADA or on filing an ADA related complaint, call **1-800-514-0301**.

History of the ADA

The ADA owes its birthright not to any one person, or any few, but to the many thousands of people who make up the disability rights movement – people who have worked for years organizing and attending protests, licking envelopes, sending out alerts, drafting legislation, speaking, testifying, negotiating, lobbying, filing lawsuits, being arrested – doing whatever they could for a cause they believed in. There are far too many people whose commitment and hard work contributed to the passage of this historic piece of disability civil rights legislation to be able to give appropriate credit by name. Without the work of so many – without the disability rights movement – there would be no ADA.

The disability rights movement, over the last couple of decades, has made the injustices faced by people with disabilities visible to the American public and to politicians. This required reversing the centuries-long history of “out of sight, out of mind” that the segregation of disabled people served to promote. The disability rights movement adopted many of the strategies of the civil rights movements before it.

From: A Movement Perspective

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<http://dredf.org/news/publications/the-history-of-the-ada/>