



Entertains Informs Empowers

AMI Disability Language Guide



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Introduction

Determining the appropriate use of language when referring to members of disability communities is a very complex subject with many differing viewpoints. This Disability Language Guide has been created to provide AMI employees and partners with known best practices that can be applied when communicating with or about persons with disabilities.

While there is no universal standard and language preference can vary based on the individual and or group, two of the most common forms of language used are "Person-first," and "Identity-first."

Person-first language refers to the person before the disability, e.g., "person who is blind" or "people with spinal cord injuries." Identity-first language refers to the disability first, e.g., "autistic person," or "Deaf individual." Asking an individual or group their preferred language is recommended, however if that feedback is not available then, in alignment with the Federal Government, it is suggested to use person-first language as a default.

Feedback

As language is continuously changing and evolving this document will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Your feedback is always encouraged and if you have any questions, concerns or require further information, please click on the following links to find out how to submit your comments.

[Accessibility Feedback Process](#)

[Accessibility Feedback Form](#)

[AMI Employee Accessibility Feedback Form](#)

Terminologies

Accessible - (place or thing)

Refers to an adjective to describe a place or a thing that has been made accessible.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• parking• seating• doors• washroom stall• bathrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• accessible parking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• handicap parking• disabled parking

Assistive or Mobility Device

Refers to a device used to assist persons with a disability.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wheelchair• white cane• walker• prosthetic	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who is a wheelchair user• person who requires, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• confined to a wheelchair• wheelchair-bound• forced to use a wheelchair• restricted to a wheelchair• wheelchair bound• mobility impaired

Blind, Partially Sighted

Refers to how well a person sees, or whether they see anything

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• blind• partially sighted• legally blind• low vision• Deafblind• albinism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• person who is blind• person who has low vision• person who is Deafblind	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• "The blind"• sightless• vision loss• sight loss• albino

Comments:

- Idiomatic expressions are OK to use when talking to people with disabilities. Saying, "It was good to see you," and "See you later," to a person who is blind is completely acceptable; the community uses these expressions themselves.
- People with albinism can be classified as disabled because of the associated visual impairments.
- People with low vision are partially sighted individuals who may or may not be classified as legally blind. The term legally blind is a measured level of blindness that has been defined by law to limit some activities for safety reasons, such as driving.

Deaf (upper case D)/deaf (lower case D)

Refers to how well a person hears, or whether they hear anything.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• hard of hearing		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• hearing impaired

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deafblind (uppercase D) • deafblind (lowercase d) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person who is hard of hearing • Deaf (upper case) is an exception to the person first language and it is recommended to use identity first language, e.g. "Deaf artist" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf-mute • Deaf and dumb
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Comments:

- Many people who are Deaf communicate with sign language and are members of a cultural and linguistic minority group. They refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital "D."
- The term "deaf" (lowercase) is a general term which refers to a person's audiological status or condition. This term encompasses many groups of people, most of whom do not identify themselves as being part of the cultural Deaf (uppercase) community.

Developmental Disability

Refers to how well a person communicates or understands written or spoken language

<p><u>Includes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developmental disability 	<p><u>Best Practice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person with a developmental disability 	<p><u>Not Acceptable</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentally retarded • retarded • mentally defective,
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intellectual disability • Autism spectrum • Down syndrome • spina bifida • neurodivergent • cognitive disability • neurological disability • epilepsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism spectrum is an exception to the person first language and is recommended to use identity first language, e.g. "Autistic artist" • person who has epilepsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentally challenged • intellectually disabled • developmentally delayed • afflicted by • feeble minded • idiot • imbecile • moron • simple • mongoloid • epileptic
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Comments:

- Asperger Syndrome has recently been categorized under the umbrella diagnosis of Autism spectrum and the term is no longer used.

Disability (Physical)

Refers to how well a person is able to move with regards to their everyday function, mobility, flexibility, and dexterity.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cerebral palsy (CP) • multiple sclerosis (MS) • Parkinson's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person with a disability • person who has cerebral palsy, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Disabled" • handicapped • physically challenged

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muscular dystrophy • limb difference 	<p>multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, muscular dystrophy, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person with a limb difference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physically impaired • crippled • lame • invalid • afflicted by • stricken with • victim of • suffers from • living with • special needs • differently abled • diverse ability • handi-capable
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Comments:

- Facial difference does not denote a disability however some severe conditions or syndromes can affect a person's facial functioning capabilities.

Learning Disability (Invisible)

Refers to how well a person processes information with varying difficulties with learning, reasoning, decision-making, or problem-solving.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person with a learning disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • suffers from • dumb • incompetent

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dyslexia • dyscalculia • neurodivergent 		
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Little Person (LP)

Refers to a person of short stature. An adult diagnosed with the height of 4 feet, 10 inches (147cm) or under.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • little person (LP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [person] is a little person • person of short stature • most people prefer to be referred to by their name 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • midget • dwarf

Mental Health Related Disability

Refers to how well a person experiences and manages emotions, thoughts, and sensations in different ways.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • psychosocial disabilities • post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person with a mental health disability • person who has depression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • neurotic • psychotic • mental patient • lunatic • mental disease

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bipolar disorder • anxiety disorder • depression • obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) • neurodivergent • schizophrenia, including altered perception syndrome • psychosis spectrum syndrome and neuro-emotional integration disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person diagnosed with, etc. • person who experiences, etc. • when referring to someone’s mental illness it is preferred to reference the specific diagnosis to avoid blanket terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentally ill • crazy • mad • insane • maniac
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Non-Disabled or does not have a disability

Refers to a person who does not have a disability or who has not disclosed a disability.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • non-disabled • sighted • hearing • neurotypical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person without a disability • person of average height 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never refer to a person as being “normal” or “regular” when compared to a person with a disability

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able bodied
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Comments:

- “Sighted,” “Hearing,” and “Neurotypical” are terms used in reference to an individual or groups of people not included in that disability community.

Para, Blind and Adaptive Sports

Refers to a person with a disability who competes in athletics.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blind sports • para sports • adaptive sports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person is a para-athlete • athlete with a disability • Paralympian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disabled athlete • blind Athlete

Comments:

- The Paralympics are for elite athletes competing every four years whereas the Special Olympics provides sporting opportunities year-round for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

Service Animal

Refers to an animal that is trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual or other mental disability

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guide dog • mobility dog • hearing dog • assistance animal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • guide dogs • service dog (SD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blind dogs • dogs for the blind • seeing eye dog (unless referring to the trademark registered Seeing Eye organization)

Comments:

- Dogs are most used animals for assistance and are certified, in writing, as having been trained by a professional service animal Institution.
- Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained, or untrained, are not considered service animals. Emotional Support animals (ESA) do not qualify as service animals because they do not require any specialized training but a letter from a qualified mental health professional is required to be recognized as an ESA otherwise, the animal is considered a companion or pet.

Speech Disability

Refers to a person who knows what they want to say but has trouble producing sounds to create words which results in repetition of sounds, syllables or words.

<u>Includes</u>	<u>Best Practice</u>	<u>Not Acceptable</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • speech disorder 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inarticulate

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stammer • stutter • apraxia of speech • speech aphasia • lisp • dysarthria • dysfluent speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person with a speech disability • person with a stutter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • incoherent • speech impaired
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Conclusion

In general, it is always best to ask someone how they identify rather than making assumptions. Use clear, respectful and simple language and allow people to self-identify as they choose. If no preference has been provided, it is recommended as a default to use the person first language.

Links to resources

- [About Face: Defining Differences](#)
- [AMI Video: In Focus Language and Disability 2021](#)
- [Assistance Dogs International](#)
- [Autism Alliance of Canada Language Guide 2024](#)
- [Bus Stop Films - The Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit](#)
- [Communication Disabilities Access Canada](#)
- [Government of Canada - A way with Words and Images 2024](#)
- [Humber College - Inclusive Language in Media 2017](#)
- [NCDJ - Disability Language Style Guide 2021](#)
- [Perkins -Evolution of disability language and labels](#)