

DECODING DISCRIMINATION EXPANDED

In the 2023 national discussion between BIPOC members of the intellectual and developmental disabilities community and healthcare professionals, three categories of goals for improvement were identified:

- **Communication:** How healthcare professionals and people with disabilities communicate
- **Attitudes:** Addressing the inappropriate sentiments and behaviors towards disabled patients
- **The Pandemic:** Issues related to COVID-19

COMMUNICATION

- Allowing disabled patients to speak for themselves—not solely through loved ones
- Communicating respectfully, not just in language but also in tone (i.e., refrain from using a baby voice or talking with exaggeratedly wide eyes)
- Utilizing the multiple communication platforms available (email, video, translators, etc.)
- Eradicating judgmental, dismissive, or minimizing language (words like “only”, “obese”, and “defective”)

ATTITUDES

- Misrepresenting accommodations as the patient seeking “special” treatment
- Shaming disabled patients for needing accommodations
- Having a “take what you get” approach to care
- Pressuring patients to look or behave a certain way—expecting that patients must present as “respectable” or “smart” in order to be taken seriously
- Expecting disabled patients to negotiate for their needs or identity
- Using disabled patients as “canaries in a coal mine”

THE PANDEMIC

- Using phrases like “ending the emergency” in regard to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is misleading; it is still disproportionately affecting the disabled community
- More information is needed about how COVID affects those with disabilities and how patients can best advocate for their needs regarding the ongoing pandemic

MOVING FORWARD

In order to move toward the goal of improving these issues, it is important to remember that these problems predate the pandemic. Additionally, the most marginalized members of the disabled community often do not have access to decision-making spaces. Going forward, there must be a focused effort toward building trust and ensuring that their voices are heard and fully incorporated into healthcare.

