

The New Freedom Initiative

Summary

The New Freedom Initiative is a government-wide effort directed at eliminating the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in community life. People with disabilities and older adults - and the people who care for them - can all benefit from being fully engaged in community life.

Background

President Bush announced the New Freedom Initiative on February 1, 2001, as part of a nationwide effort to remove barriers to community living for people with disabilities. Today, there are more than 54 million Americans living with a disability, representing a full 20 percent of the U.S. population. Almost half of these individuals have a severe disability affecting their ability to see, hear, walk or perform other basic functions of life. In addition, there are more than 25 million family caregivers and millions more who provide aid and assistance to people with disabilities.

While recognizing the critical role that the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) has played in removing barriers – both architectural and attitudinal – faced by people with disabilities, the New Freedom Initiative recognizes that more work needs to be done. While the ADA makes it unlawful for employers to discriminate against qualified applicants and employees because of disability, reliable transportation, a quality education, and access to technology are equally important to reducing the unemployment rate of people with disabilities. The Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581 (1999), stated that people with disabilities should be provided services in the community rather than in institutions, whenever appropriate. *Olmstead* was an important step toward achieving the promise of full integration of people with disabilities into the community.

The New Freedom Initiative is a comprehensive plan that represents an important step in working to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, make choices about their daily lives and participate fully in community life. The Initiative's goals are to:

- o Increase access to assistive and universally designed technologies;
- o Expand educational opportunities;
- o Promote homeownership;
- o Integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce;
- o Expand transportation options; and
- o Promote full access to community life.

The initiative's specific proposals that directly involve U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) include: promoting full access to community life through swift implementation of the *Olmstead* Supreme Court decision; integrating Americans with disabilities into the workforce through swift implementation of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (TWWIIA); and the creation of the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. As a part of the New Freedom Initiative, the President issued Executive Order

13217, "Community-Based Alternatives for Individuals with Disabilities," on June 18, 2001. The Order called upon the federal government to assist states and localities to swiftly implement the decision of the United States Supreme Court in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, stating: "The United States is committed to community-based alternatives for individuals with disabilities and recognizes that such services advance the best interests of the United States."

NFI Caregiver Subcommittee

The New Freedom Initiative Caregiver Workgroup was established to identify and coordinate existing caregiver support activities across agencies within HHS. The workgroup is a sub-group of the HHS New Freedom Initiative staff group that was established to respond to the President's Executive Order on Community-Based Alternatives. The workgroup plays a leadership role in promoting solutions as well as coordinating overall HHS caregiver support activities.

Broadcast

On September 19, 2007 the New Freedom Initiative (NFI) Subcommittee on Caregiving presented a broadcast titled *The Department of Health and Human Services Programs Supporting Caregivers Across the Life Span*.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has a range of programs with services and support for the caregivers, providers, and partners who help people with disabilities and older Americans. The broadcast includes a panel of experts from across the agency that will provide targeted information about these programs. The broadcast will bring greater awareness and understanding of HHS programs to caregivers, providers, and partners. Results of the broadcast include more caregivers taking advantage of services and support and partners and providers will be able to better deliver and coordinate caregiver services.

NFI sponsor additional educational and informative Satellite Broadcasts, including webcasts, on issues that are important to caregivers and service providers. Our goal is to bring greater awareness and sensitivity to the challenges in caregiving and improve the coordination of resources and services for caregivers, providers, and partners.

Broadcast Panel Members

Kerry Weems, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

Josefina Carbonell, Administration on Aging

Dr. Margaret Giannini, Office on Disability

Gail Gibson-Hunt, National Alliance for Caregiving

Rick Greene, Administration on Aging

Susan Hill, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

Susie Butler, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

Bruce Finke, Indian Health Service

Yvonne Jackson, Administration on Aging

Faith McCormick, Administration on Developmental Disabilities

Diana Denboba, Health Resources and Services Administration