

# Disabilities: Federal and State Public Policy

## TIPS AND RESOURCES



### What is disability?

Disability is a physical or mental condition that can affect a person's ability to think, learn, behave, communicate, feel, and/or relate. Disability is a natural part of the human experience and does not diminish a person's right or desire to participate fully in all aspects of life. One in five individuals has a disability. Conditions like Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down syndrome, learning disabilities, and ADHD manifest before age 22.

### What is disability policy?

Disability policy is public policy that can lead to the enactment of federal and state laws that protect and advance civil rights for people with disabilities. For example, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) articulates our Nation's goals to guarantee equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

### How does the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) impact policy?

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VKC UCEDD) has a Congressional mandate to educate policy makers. We inform public policy discussions and legislation by:

- Sharing research findings or the clinical expertise of VKC faculty, staff, and trainees
- Facilitating an annual story project that invites University students and Tennesseans with disabilities to craft messages for sharing in Tennessee and on Capitol Hill.
- Hosting an annual training for students, researchers, health care professionals, service providers, educators,

individuals with disabilities, and family members to encourage advocacy and Hill visits.

- Staff and faculty participate in public policy events such as Tennessee Disability Day on the Hill and the Disability Policy Seminar, and serve on national and state public policy and planning committees and task forces.

### Who do we work with?

We have many community partners who share our policy priorities. The VKC UCEDD Public Policy Team includes members from The Arc Tennessee, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Disability Rights Tennessee, and parent and student advocates. The Team works closely with both the Vanderbilt University and the Vanderbilt University Medical Center Offices of Federal Relations and disability organizations across the state and nation.

### Where can public policy makers get current, authoritative disability information in Tennessee?

- **Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network:** The federal Developmental Disabilities Act creates State Councils, Protection and Advocacy Systems, and University Centers for Excellence in every state and U.S. territory. Disability Rights Tennessee, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, University of Tennessee Center on Developmental Disabilities, and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities are Tennessee's Developmental Disabilities Network. Each agency prioritizes public policy.
- **University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs):** Funded by the Administration For Community Living, UCEDDs work with people with disabilities, family members, state and local government agencies, and community providers in projects that provide training, service and technical assistance, research, and information sharing. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the University of Tennessee Center on Developmental Disabilities are Tennessee's UCEDDs.
- **Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers (IDDRCs):** Funded by the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, IDDRCs represent the nation's first and foremost sustained effort to prevent and treat disabilities through biomedical and behavioral research. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center is one of the original IDDRCs.

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## RESOURCES



- **The Arc Tennessee:** The Arc US is the largest national community-based organization advocating for and serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Each state has state and local chapters of The Arc. The Arc Tennessee prioritizes public policy education and advocacy.
- **Tennessee Disability Coalition:** An alliance of organizations and individuals joined to promote the full and equal participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life. The Coalition organizes and influences public policy both administratively and legislatively.

### Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, educators and service providers, researchers, students, and policy makers. Faculty and staff engage in interdisciplinary research, training, service, and information dissemination and work in collaboration with local, state and national networks and partners. (615) 322-8240, toll-free (866) 936-8852, [vkc.vumc.org](http://vkc.vumc.org)

### Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website includes a directory of more than 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county, topic of interest, and other filters. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and is partially funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and other state agencies. (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636, [TNPathfinder.org](http://TNPathfinder.org)

### Tennessee Resources

- The Arc Tennessee  
[www.thearctn.org](http://www.thearctn.org), (800) 835-7077, (615) 248-5878
- Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network  
[TNDDNetwork.org](http://TNDDNetwork.org)
- Tennessee Disability Coalition [www.tndisability.org](http://www.tndisability.org), (615) 383-9442, toll-free (888) 643-7811

### National Resources

- **Administration for Community Living**  
[www.acl.gov](http://www.acl.gov), (202) 690-6590
- **Association of University Centers on Disabilities**  
[www.aucd.org](http://www.aucd.org), (301) 588-8252
- **The Arc US**  
[thearc.org](http://thearc.org), (301) 565-3842, toll-free (800) 433-5255
- **Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy**, [www.disabilitypolicycenter.org](http://www.disabilitypolicycenter.org), (202) 466-6550
- **Office of Disability Employment Policy**  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>
- **KidsHealth** information for kids, teens, and parents  
[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)
- **State of the States in Developmental Disabilities**  
[www.stateofthestates.org](http://www.stateofthestates.org)

