MODULE # 4: Physical Access to Health Care

Improving Access to Health Care for People with Disabilities

A self-directed training for aging and disability organizations
Who Needs Physical Access?

- People with physical, mental, cognitive, or intellectual limitations such as difficulty:
  - Walking, balancing, climbing
  - Seeing or hearing
  - Reading
  - Understanding or remembering
What is Physical Access?

• Practically speaking, at a minimum physical access means:
  – If parking is provided, wheelchair accessible parking should be available
  – A level entrance into the facility
  – An accessible path within the facility
  – An elevator if offices and services are provided above the first floor
What is Physical Access?

– Wheelchair accessible restroom facilities that are close by
– Signage indicating where accessible facilities are located
– Tactile signage such as raised lettering and Braille labels in locations such as elevators, and indicating the location of facilities such as restrooms, meeting rooms, and other facility functions and services
Examples of Physical Access Problems and Solutions
Problem Routes

[Images of various problematic routes for pedestrians]

www.pedestrians.org
Problem Routes

• Accessibility features are not always available

• Barriers such as
  – Lack of ramps and curb ramps
  – Poles and fire hydrants blocking routes

• Negotiating the alternate routes required to avoid these barriers involves longer distances that some people cannot physically manage
Accessible Route
PARKING

• Accessible parking
  – Should be close to buildings and facilities for people with mobility, stamina, and energy limitations

• The Access Aisle
  – The striped area between accessible parking spaces
    • Often misused by motorcyclists and small car owners
  – Purpose is to provide space for entry and exit of vehicles by people who use mobility devices
Parking

• If parking is available

**PROBLEM**

**SOLUTION**
Signage

• Directional signage should indicate accessible routes and building entrances
• Especially important when accessible entrance is not also the main entrance
• Accessible routes should lead to accessible entrances
• Signage should use simple, sans serif fonts
• Tactile signs should use uppercase
Signage

**Problem**

**Solution**
Building Entrances

**PROBLEM**

**SOLUTION**
Internal Routes

• Internal accessible routes
  – Internal routes must be accessible and free of objects that block aisles and doorways
  – Common barriers include trash cans, carts, plants, objects protruding from the walls, and storage containers
Accessible Path to Exam Room
Restrooms

**PROBLEM**

**SOLUTION**
Accessible restrooms

• Tiny bathrooms with narrow doors cannot be used by many with mobility impairments, especially those who use wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, and crutches

• Accessible restrooms features include
  – Main doorways that are 32 inches wide
  – Adequate wheelchair transfer space in front of and beside the toilet
  – Grab bars beside and behind the toilet
  – Elevated toilet seat
  – Knee clearance under the sink
Exam Rooms

**Problem**

**Solution**
Accessible Exam Rooms

• Accessible exam rooms make it possible for people with mobility disabilities to receive appropriate care. In an accessible room, they can:
  – Move around the room
  – Approach and use medical equipment

• Accessible rooms should have:
  – An accessible route to and through the room
  – Accessible equipment (e.g., height adjustable exam table)
  – Room for transfers and use of lift equipment
Exam Tables

**PROBLEM**

**SOLUTION**
Weight Scales

**PROBLEM**

**SOLUTION**
Other Medical Equipment

Lift Equipment

Accessible Mammography Equipment
Accessible Medical Equipment

• Availability of accessible medical equipment is an important part of providing accessible medical care
  – Such equipment includes
    • Adjustable-height exam tables and chairs
    • Wheelchair-accessible scales
    • Adjustable-height radiologic equipment
    • Portable floor and overhead track lifts
    • Height-adjustable gurneys and stretchers
Access Means Equal Care

• Devices such as patient lifts enable health care providers to assist people with standing and walking limitations
  – Get onto and off of exam and diagnostic tables and chairs
  – On and off gurneys and hospital beds
  – The equipment can make the difference between getting a test or exam or not

• Accessible mammography equipment allows a woman to sit on a chair or remain in her wheelchair and be tested
Modification of Standard Policies and Procedures

• Flexible appointment time
Modifying the 10 minute Office Visit Policy

• People with various disabilities may require more time for an office visit with a medical provider or for a medical procedure than people who do not have disabilities typically need:
  – A person with a speech disability might require more time to speak and be understood
  – A person with a cognitive or intellectual disability might require more time to speak as well as more time to understand what is being said
  – People who require dressing or lifting assistance might require more time to prepare for an exam or get on the exam table
Modification of Standard Policies and Procedures

• Service animals

**Problem**

**Solution**
Modifying the No Animals Policy

• People with various disabilities may require service animals
  – A service animal is a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability
  – Examples of such work or tasks include
    • Guiding people who are blind
    • Alerting people who are deaf
    • Pulling a wheelchair
    • Alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure
    • Reminding a person with mental illness to take prescribed medications
    • Calming a person with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) during an anxiety attack
  – Service animals are working animals, not pets.
  – Service animal are allowed in health care treatment areas such as patient rooms, clinics, cafeterias, or examination rooms
  – Service animals can be excluded from units where the animal’s presence may compromise a sterile environment such as operating rooms
  – Entities covered by the ADA must modify their policies to permit miniature horses where reasonable
How Will a Provider Know When to or Provide an Accommodation or Modify a Policy?

• When someone asks
• When it is obviously useful, the provider or staff can offer, or ask the person with a disability if they require any assistance
Meet Tanya

- Tanya is a woman in her late 20’s who has cerebral palsy and is a wheelchair user
- She is pregnant and is seeking an obstetrician whose office is wheelchair accessible
- There are only two providers in her managed care network, both have only stairs into their office building
- Her health plan denied her request for an out-of-network referral to a provider located in an accessible building
What Can You Do?

• Disability and aging organizations can assist people with disabilities resolve access problems.

• Possible actions:
  – Advise the person that they have health care rights
    • Non-discrimination
    • Access to accessible health care provider
  – Urge Tanya to contact the managed care plan again and request an out-of-network referral to an accessible provider, or call the plan yourself
    • Explain that lack of accessible provider options is not permitted under federal law
  – If the plan fails to voluntarily provide an out-of-network referral, advise Tanya to file a complaint with the managed care plan first, then with the relevant state agency overseeing managed care.
**Quiz**

**Question # 1:** Physical access for people with disabilities means (choose the most appropriate answer)

A. A buzzer that summons someone who will carry a wheelchair user up the stairs into the provider building

B. A multi-stall restroom with one stall door removed to widen the entry for a wheelchair user

C. A building entrance whose entry is level, but that has steps inside the door

D. A level rear door building entry with signage at the main entrance indicating the location of the level entry
Question # 2: Charles, a wheelchair user due to rheumatoid arthritis has been told to schedule a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) test. He cannot independently get onto the exam table for the test. What should the testing facility do? (Choose the most appropriate answer)

A. Ask Charles to bring someone to lift him onto the table
B. Tell Charles they can’t perform the test because they cannot provide lifting assistance
C. Ask Charles if he prefers to be lifted by another person or use the mechanical lift the facility provides
D. Tell Charles he must be able to stand and take a few steps in order to have the test
Quiz—Answer in Red

Question # 1: Physical access for people with disabilities means (choose the most appropriate answer)

A. A buzzer that summons someone who will carry a wheelchair user up the stairs into the provider building
B. A multi-stall restroom with one stall door removed to widen the entry for a wheelchair user
C. A building entrance whose entry is level, but that has steps inside the door
D. A level rear door building entry with signage at the main entrance indicating the location of the level entry
Question # 2: Charles, a wheelchair user due to rheumatoid arthritis has been told to schedule a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) test. He cannot independently get onto the exam table for the test. What should the testing facility do? (Choose the most appropriate answer)

A. Ask Charles to bring someone to lift him onto the table
B. Tell Charles they can’t perform the test because they cannot provide lifting assistance
C. Ask Charles if he prefers to be lifted by another person or use the mechanical lift the facility provides
D. Tell Charles he must be able to stand and take a few steps in order to have the test