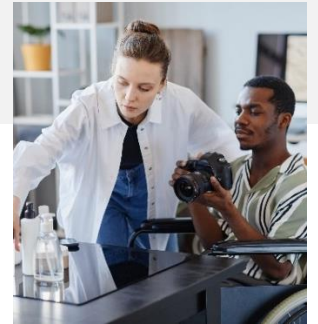




Mental Health & Wellness in the Workplace

Diversity Lab | August 2025

Disability Belongs™



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Redefining Narratives. Developing Leaders. Driving Opportunity.

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Today's Facilitator



**Ariel A. Simms,
Esq.**
(they/she)
President & CEO
Disability Belongs™



Who We Are

Disability Belongs™ is a diverse, disability-led nonprofit. Our mission is to **drive cultural and policy change** to ensure our full representation and influence, **creating a more accessible, equitable, and inclusive society.**



Today's Learning Objectives

By the end of the session, legal professionals will be able to:

1. Explain the **concept of disability**, including both the legal definition of disability, as well as disability as an intersectional identity.
2. Learn strategies to **manage mental health at work** and why it matters to those working in the legal profession.
3. Get ideas on **what wellness means for you!**





61 million

People in the United States have a disability

1 in 4

Adults have a disability
(physical, sensory, cognitive,
mental health or other)*

**Source: U.S. Census Bureau*



Defining Disability

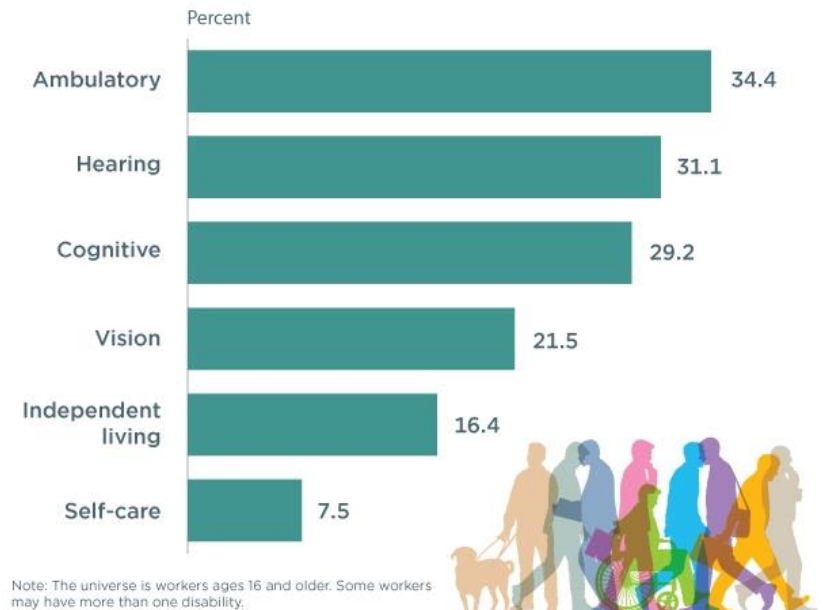
The Americans with Disabilities Act (the “ADA”) defines disability as “**a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.**”

Major life activities include such activities as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working.

- Both temporary and permanent disabilities are covered by the ADA
- Respondents who report any one of the six disability types are considered to have a disability

Types of Disabilities

Type of Disability Among Workers With a Disability: 2017



United States[®]
Census
Bureau

U.S. Department of Commerce
Economics and Statistics Administration
U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
[census.gov](https://www.census.gov)

Source: 2017 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.
www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/





Disability is Human Diversity

Anyone can acquire a disability from aging, an accident, trauma, and/or illness.

Becoming an ally now can make adapting to having a disability easier.

People with disabilities are **diverse and part of all communities**.



Disabilities Are...

Temporary and Permanent



Apparent and Nonapparent



From Birth or Acquired Later



How does mental health fit in with the disability community?

- According to the ADA, yes!
 - “Physical or mental impairment” that impacts your everyday life is a disability
- Not all people who identify as having a mental health concern consider themselves disabled
 - No consensus on terminology or preferred descriptors
 - Safety in disclosure and safety in choosing your own identity is important
 - Embrace every journey on this continuum



Share in the Chat:

What gives you a sense of belonging
in the workplace?

Mental Health at Work

- Mental health is health!
 - Meaning, you need to manage it as you would every other aspect of your health
- Acknowledging the importance of mental health builds trust
 - Open, respectful dialogue reduces stigma and improves performance and retention
 - Support—not pressure—helps people succeed
- Recognize mental health conditions as disabilities, but respect how people choose to identify
- Include mental health in your diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies
- Normalize conversations about mental health in the workplace



Prevalence of Mental Health Disabilities Among Lawyers

- Depression – **33%**
 - Anxiety – **68.7%**
 - Other Mental Health Concern – **29.5%**
-
- “Mental Health Problems are at a Critical Level” – **43%**
 - “I would not recommend the legal profession to other family members.” – **45.8%**



Why does this matter to me as an employer?

- Train all manager-level staff to recognize signs of mental health issues and respond appropriately
- Protect confidentiality and invite voluntary self-identification
- Offer reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Offer Employee Assistance Programs and mental health resources
- Partner with disability-led organizations, such as Disability Belongs™, to create truly inclusive, supportive workplaces informed by lived experience



Nothing About Us, Without Us

- Problems are best solved by working with people who have experienced them firsthand and know solutions that work
- **Disability is part of every issue area, including every area of law**
- Understanding how to prioritize mental health is essential to your career and how you serve your clients



Destigmatizing Mental Health

- Talk about lived experience
- Galvanize a movement to create systemic, organizational cultural and policy changes
- Employers can invest in mental health, creating change and increasing productivity
- Normalize seeking support
 - In 2022, 23% of U.S. adults had received mental health services in the past 12 months



Talk About Mental Health

Say the word. “Disability” is not a bad word!

Don’t use euphemisms like
“differently-abled” or “special needs.”

Use “**non-disabled**” instead of
“able-bodied” or “normal.”

Avoid passive, victim words.
Use accurate, respectful language.
Instead of “he suffers from depression,”
use “he **has** depression.”

Eliminate common ableist language:
Ex: Crazy

Avoid referring to “the disabled” in the same way
that you would avoid referring to “the Asians,”
“the Jews” or “the African-Americans.” Instead,
consider using such terms as “**the disability
community**” or “**the disability activist**.”

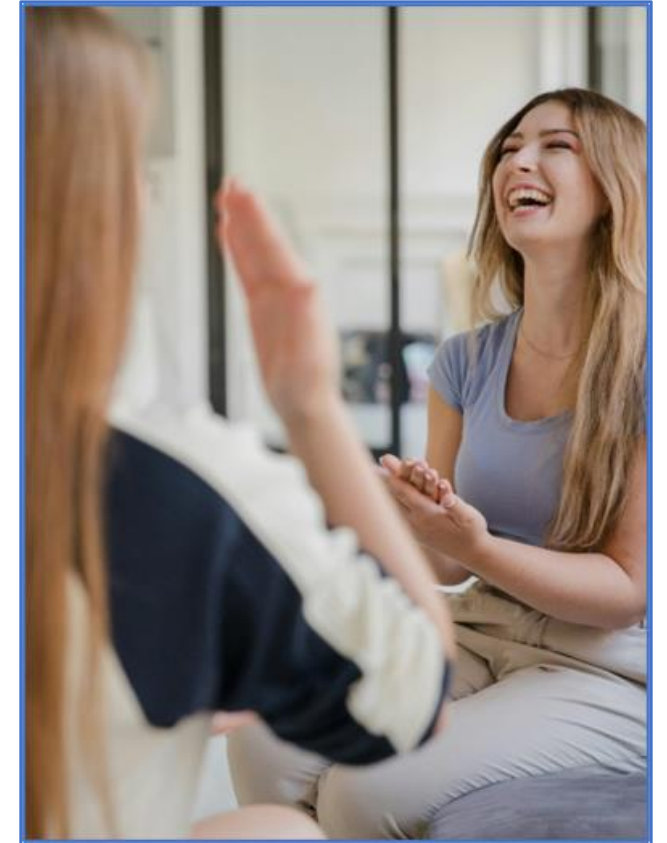
Avoid “**high-functioning**” and “**low-functioning**”
labels.

People with disabilities should not be described
as “inspirational” or “courageous” just because
they have a disability.



Prioritizing Mental Health, Preventing Burnout

- Key strategies for avoiding burnout include:
 - Self-care
 - Well-being
 - Mindfulness
 - Nutrition
 - Sleep
- Add flexibility to your work schedule
- Communicate with co-workers regarding boundaries and what you need to do to be successful
- Do whatever relaxes you (physical activity, baths, meditation etc.)



Listening to Your Body

- Schedule things you overlook (eating and sleeping)
- Have intentional, balanced meals
- Get ample sleep (sleep hygiene)
 - Set a good bedtime and stick to it!
- Energy Journaling
 - Write down what gave you energy and drained your energy
 - Think about how you can change your schedule to preserve energy
 - Don't do too many tasks in a row that drain your energy
- “Spoon” Theory
 - Concept that people have a limited amount of energy in a day and simple tasks (taking a shower and getting dressed) expend a lot of energy
 - People have different amounts of spoons (energy units) each day
 - People will do more when they have energy, because they know that they may have less energy on future days



Identifying Emotions

- What makes you feel **Happy**?
- What makes you feel **Worried/Anxious**?
- What do you do to help feel **Calm**?
- Identify ways to self-soothe or self-regulate your emotions
 - Jot strategies down on a piece of paper and hang on refrigerator or post near bed



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

| Title | Subject | Who's affected? |
|-----------|--|--|
| Title I | Employment | Private employers with 15+ employees; all public employers |
| Title II | Public Programs and Activities | State and local governments |
| Title III | Public Accommodations | Hotels, restaurants, doctor's offices, private schools, day cares, health clubs, sports stadiums, movie theaters, etc. |
| Title IV | Telecommunications (closed captioning) | Telephone and internet companies |
| Title V | Miscellaneous Provisions | Various entities |



Reasonable Accommodations

- Accommodations or “productivity enhancers” will help employers unlock the potential of their employees
- Ensure equal opportunity in the application process
- Enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job
- Make it possible for an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment
- An employer is not required to make an accommodation if it would impose an "undue hardship" on the operation of the employer's business
 - Consider nature and cost of accommodation with respect to size, resources, nature, and structure of the employer's operation



Sample Accommodations

- Flexible schedule
 - Work optimally during hours of increased attentiveness
- Modified break schedule
 - Mental rest to refocus/reorient
- Rest area/private space
 - Space to rest, take medication, or perform daily health activities
- Getting clear and timely feedback in writing, or in multiple formats
- Use assistive technologies such as closed captioning ([zoom automatic captions](#))



Mental Health Resources

- If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis:
 - Contact the 988 Lifeline or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-8255 (24 hours, free, in English or Spanish)

U.S.-based resources/organizations:

- [Mental Health America](#)
- [NAMI](#)
- [Project Semicolon](#)
- And/or contact your insurance company for further guidance.



Continue Your Mental Health and Wellness Journey with Disability Belongs™

- **Trainings** with whole staff or management teams
- **Review of policies** with an accessibility and inclusion lens
- **ERG workshops/facilitated conversations** on mental health
- **Tip sheets or guides** for your staff on understanding mental health in the workplace
- **Mental health and neurodiversity:** Navigating both at work!



Growing In Your Disability Inclusion Journey



- Think of what you are doing now that can be changed or altered
- Incorporate best practices
- Learn more about the identities of your current staff – strive for a fully representative team
- **Partner with a disability (especially a disability-led) organization**

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Continue Your Disability Inclusion Journey with Disability Belongs™

- [Best Practices: Recruitment and Retention](#)
- [Creating a Welcoming, Inclusive and Accessible Organization](#)
- [Ensuring Accessible In-Person and Virtual Events](#)
- [Workplace Accommodations](#)
- [Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy](#)



Email

Partners@DisabilityBelongs.org
for more information.

[**Free Disability Belongs™
Webinars**](#)

Investing in Disability Inclusion through Sponsorship

- Invest in unrestricted operating support for an organization focused on making systemic change for the disability community by **redefining narratives of disability, developing disabled leaders, and driving opportunity for every disabled person** to fully participate in all aspects of community.
- We believe that our **partnership is mutually beneficial** and will **provide your brand exposure to the larger disability community**, which is a valuable segment of a **\$13 trillion consumer base**.
- Forward-thinking businesses that show intentionality and action toward disability inclusion more effectively **demonstrate their social responsibility and increase their profitability**.
- With 80,000+ followers and 80,000 email subscribers!
 - We're thrilled to engage with individuals from all corners of the cross-disability community, connecting through dynamic sectors like entertainment, policy, faith, and workforce development.





Thank You!

Presenter:

Ariel Simms, President and CEO of Disability Belongs™

For More Information:

Contact Partners@DisabilityBelongs.org

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Additional Sources

- [Above the Law – Mental Health for Lawyers](#) (2025)
- [ALM - Mental Health by the Numbers](#) (2025)
- [Panchal and Lo – Exploring the Rise of Mental Health](#) (2024)

