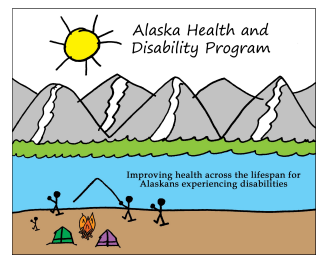


Sexual Health Among Alaskan Adults with Disabilities



Introduction

The World Health Organization defines sexual health as:

A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.¹

Experiencing a disability, whether it is intellectual, physical, blindness or low-vision, psychiatric, or deaf or hard-of-hearing, does not justify any loss of rights related to sexuality and sexual health. All people, regardless of the experience of a disability, have inherent sexual rights and basic human needs.

Background

Unfortunately, sexual health for people with disabilities is often overlooked. Many in society do not feel it is a component of overall health and view those with disabilities as being asexual or deviant in their behaviors and desires. As a result, people with disabilities encounter prejudice and negative reactions in regard to their sexual well-being. Many people with disabilities have limited sexual health knowledge and do not have access to educational opportunities. Further, people with disabilities have limited opportunity to engage in sexual behaviors and relationships.

Conclusions

All people have the right to exercise choices regarding friendships, sexual expression, and responsible sexual behavior.² People with disabilities should be given opportunities to access information that allows informed decisions around issues of sexuality and health. People with disabilities, like all people, should be free from prejudice and harassment as they pursue their sexual rights. Everyone has the responsibility to consider the values, rights, and feelings of others related to sexuality, including individuals with disabilities. Resources should be made available to Alaskans with disabilities to make informed decisions and increase awareness of sexual health, and also have access to screening services.

Recommendations:

1. Promote the development of media campaigns and resources on sexual health that are accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities.
2. Encourage the participation of people with disabilities on health advisory boards throughout the Alaska to ensure representation.
3. Develop and disseminate accessible sexual health resources for health care providers, disability providers, people with disabilities, and supports.
4. Provide sexual health trainings to disability providers to both increase knowledge and the use of best practices.

References:

1. World Health Organization. 2006. *Sexual Health*.
2. The Arc and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disability. 2004. *Sexuality—joint position statement of The Arc and AAIDD*.

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