

10 Things for Businesses to Know About the ADA



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became a law in 1990. It had strong bipartisan support and was signed by President George H.W. Bush. Although it has been around for decades, you may not know how the ADA helps to ensure that people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in their communities. Business owners need to know about how the ADA applies to them. Here are 10 things businesses should know to understand the ADA.

1. Disability is common.

More than one out of every four people has a disability.¹ Many of your customers may have a disability. People of all ages have disabilities, including children and older people. Some disabilities are “invisible.” For example, heart disease and ADHD are disabilities.

2. Businesses’ goods and services must be accessible to people with disabilities.

The purpose of the ADA is to make sure that people with disabilities have equal opportunities. Businesses must make their goods and services available to people with disabilities, both online and in person. This may involve making the space accessible by removing barriers when it is readily achievable. It also includes effective communication and reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures.

3. Tax incentives can help businesses become more accessible.

Your business may qualify for federal tax credits to help cover the cost of improving accessibility. One tax deduction helps businesses of any size remove architectural and transportation barriers and helps small businesses increase access for people with disabilities. States may also have programs to help businesses become more accessible.

4. The ADA covers people in many areas of life.

The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities at work, in state and local governments, in businesses, and in telecommunications. Examples of places covered by the ADA are grocery stores, doctors’ offices, banks, sidewalks and parking lots, theaters, restaurants, voting locations, museums, and places where people work.

5. Workers with disabilities must be able to do the job, with or without reasonable accommodations.

A reasonable accommodation is a change that allows a qualified person with a disability to perform the job’s essential functions. Reasonable accommodations must also be given as part of the application process. Most workers with disabilities do not need job accommodations, most accommodations are cost-free.²

Visit the hyperlinked web version at <https://adata.org/10-things-ada-business> or scan the QR code above for resources that supplement this printout.

6. Service animals are allowed under the ADA.

Service animals are dogs that have been trained to do a task to help a person with a disability. Examples of tasks are letting a person with epilepsy know they are about to have a seizure or alerting a Deaf person when someone comes to the door. A service animal can be any breed of dog. Service animals do not have to be registered and do not need to wear a vest. Service animals must be under control and be housebroken. Businesses can only ask two questions to figure out if a dog is a service animal:

1. Is this animal required because of a disability?
2. What work or task has this animal been trained to perform?

7. People with communication disabilities have the right to effective communication.

The goal of communication with people with disabilities is that it be as effective for people with disabilities as people without disabilities. Communication is simple in some situations, like when someone buys a coffee. Other situations are complex, like when someone buys a car. Examples of effective communication include captioning videos, hiring a sign language interpreter, providing a contract in large print, and reading a menu out loud.

8. Many websites and other types of technology must be accessible.

Inaccessible web content means that people with disabilities do not have equal access to information. State and local governments and businesses must make their websites accessible to people with disabilities.

9. New and altered buildings must meet minimum accessibility standards.

A set of rules called the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design explains the minimum standards that must be followed to make a building accessible and usable for people with disabilities. These rules apply to state and local governments, businesses that are open to the public, and commercial facilities.

10. A national network of regional centers helps people understand the ADA.

The ADA National Network provides information, guidance, and training about the ADA to support the ADA's mission to "assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities." There are 10 regional ADA Centers that cover the entire country.

Do you have a question about your business and the ADA?

The ADA has many specific details that are not included in this factsheet, and the ADA applies to each situation on a case-by-case basis. The ADA National Network can help you understand how the law applies to your situation. Visit www.adata.org, call 1-800-949-4232, or send a message at www.adata.org/email to get answers to your ADA questions.

¹Centers from Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Disability Impacts All of Us. cdc.gov/disability-and-health/media/pdfs/disability-impacts-all-of-us-infographic.pdf. 2024. Accessed 4/9/25.

²Job Accommodation Network. Costs and Benefits of Accommodation. askjan.org/topics/costs.cfm?csSearch=2546498_1. 2024. Accessed 4/18/25.

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPAD0004). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this factsheet do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.