

Section 1. What is Accessible Healthcare?

“Accessible Healthcare” is best explained as a concept and not as a defined term. In fact, no dictionary defines “Accessible Healthcare,” and if you were to conduct a Google search for the term, the search results overwhelmingly yield sites offering explanations of “healthcare access” or “access to healthcare.” Thus, conceptually as it pertains to persons with disabilities, “Accessible Healthcare” means the delivery of healthcare services (*i.e.*, screening, preventive, diagnostic and treatment) in a manner and in facilities that can accommodate and address the profound divergent needs of persons across all types of disabilities.

Specifically, for persons with paralysis and mobility disabilities, this means the ability to gain physical access to a healthcare facility and once within the facility to be able to maneuver throughout the facility. It means the ability of persons with paralysis and mobility disabilities to be examined and treated in examination and treatment rooms with doorways sufficiently wide allowing them to enter and with sufficient floor space that allows them to maneuver without damaging their mobility devices and without causing injury to themselves. Once inside examination and treatment rooms, Accessible Healthcare means the ability to transfer, or be transferred, safely onto examination tables and chairs, when clinically appropriate, either as examination tables and chairs are height adjustable to facilitate independent transfers and/or the availability of lift and transfer equipment or healthcare staff trained in safe patient handling. It means the availability and utilization of medical and diagnostic equipment so that persons with paralysis and mobility disabilities may equally benefit from such equipment as do their nondisabled counterparts, whether that be weight capturing equipment, X-ray imaging machines, or diagnostic scanning equipment like computerized axial tomography, positron

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emission tomography and nuclear medicine scanning equipment. Accessible Healthcare also encompasses the ability of persons with paralysis and mobility disabilities to communicate the reasons for their visit, their symptoms or concerns, effectively, with sufficient time spent with providers to fully understand their condition, providers' assessments and opinions, as well as available treatment options and the plan of care.

Finally, Accessible Healthcare also means that healthcare providers who care for persons with paralysis or mobility disabilities are aware that as a group, persons with paralysis and mobility disabilities are not monolithic. For example, that not all "plegia" are alike and the functional abilities of a person living with the effects of a spinal cord injury differ from those whose paralysis and disability may be as a result of multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, polio, traumatic brain injury or other congenital or acquired conditions.

In short, "Accessible Healthcare" means healthcare services and healthcare facilities that are designed and operated to welcome persons with varying types of disabilities, that can care and treat their medical needs independent of addressing their underlying disabilities, that understand and respect their differences, and that deliberately provide the same opportunity for persons with disabilities to benefit from their services as persons who are not disabled.