



Special Report

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How Dioceses and Catholic Charities Accommodate and Serve People with Disabilities

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To measure how the Catholic Church in the United States is taking up the Pope's call to recognize the strength in weakness and to be transfigured by love, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) was commissioned by Potomac Community Resources Inc., the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, the Department of Special Needs Ministries of the Archdiocese of Washington, and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington to conduct a survey of whether and how Catholic parishes, dioceses, and Catholic Charities in the United States are including serving people with disabilities in their ministries. A previous *Special Report*, issued in summer 2016, summarized the findings from the parish survey, which can be viewed at cara.georgetown.edu/Disabilities.pdf. This CARA *Special Report* presents the findings from the diocesan and Catholic Charities surveys.



Cardinal Wuerl presides at the annual White Mass recognizing the gifts of persons with special needs. (Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Washington)

diocesan and Catholic Charities surveys.

A survey was sent to all of the (arch)dioceses, (arch)eparchies, and Catholic Charities agencies in the United States. For the purposes of the survey, dioceses¹ were asked not to respond for activities that Catholic Charities offers in their territory, and the same was asked of Catholic Charities, to prevent the responses from being duplicated.

In this report, "disabilities" refers to sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness), physical disabilities (e.g., cerebral palsy), intellectual disabilities (e.g., Down syndrome), mental disabilities

KEY FINDINGS

- 98 percent of dioceses have a wheelchair accessible cathedral
- 75 percent of dioceses offer catechetical programs for people with disabilities
- 38 percent of dioceses have an office that is responsible for services for people with disabilities
- 98 percent of Catholic Charities agencies have at least some offices that are wheelchair accessible
- 72 percent of Catholic Charities agencies offer counselling services for people with disabilities
- 18 percent of Catholic Charities agencies have a department that is responsible for services for people with disabilities

(e.g., depression or schizophrenia), chronic health conditions (e.g., heart disease or diabetes), war-related disabilities (e.g., PTSD or loss of limb), aging-related disabilities (e.g., arthritis or dementia), and those on the autism spectrum.

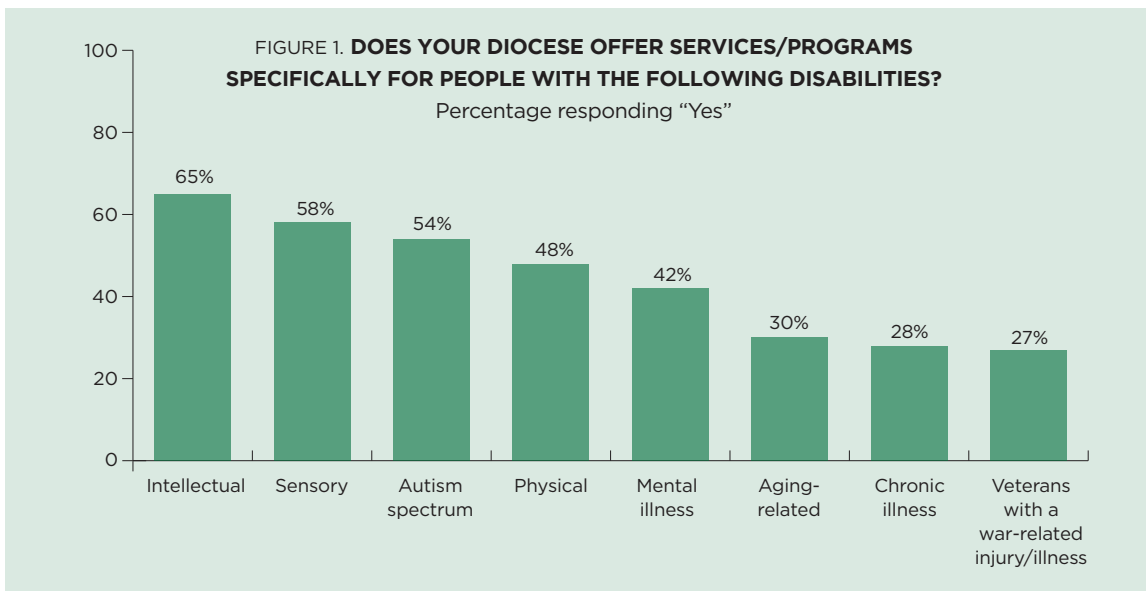
Part I: Diocesan Accommodation and Service to People with Disabilities

We call upon people of good will to reexamine their attitudes toward their brothers and sisters with disabilities and promote their well-being, acting with the sense of justice and the compassion that the Lord so clearly desires. Further, realizing the unique gifts individuals with disabilities have to offer the Church, we wish to address the need for their integration into the Christian community and their fuller participation in its life.

PASTORAL STATEMENT OF U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, 1978

DIOCESAN SERVICES/PROGRAMS

Dioceses were asked about the services and programs they offer for people with disabilities. They were asked to include activities specifically designed for people with disabilities, not just programs in which people with disabilities are included. As shown



in Figure 1, more than half of responding dioceses offer services specifically for people with intellectual disabilities, sensory disabilities, and autism. Less than half offer services for people with physical disabilities or mental illnesses, and less than one-third offer services for people with aging-related disabilities, chronic illness, or war-related injuries or illnesses.

It should be noted that the Catholic population is aging, with 20 percent of Catholics now over the age of 65, and 49 percent of Catholics over the age of 50.² Yet only one-third of dioceses offer services for those with aging-related disabilities, something that most Catholics will experience at some time in their lives.

When asked to identify specific services/programs provided to people with disabilities, the most common services that dioceses

TABLE 1. ARE ANY OF THESE SERVICES/PROGRAMS OFFERED AT THE DIOCESAN LEVEL FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES SEPARATE FROM CATHOLIC CHARITIES?

Offered by at least one in four dioceses

Pro-life advocacy	75%
Catechetical programs	75
Schools	62
Pastoral services	60
Family/parents support	53
Services for Deaf people	51
Disability advocacy	49
Education/training programs	45
Summer camps	30
Counseling services	28
Recreational programs	27
End-of-life care	25

provide are pro-life advocacy and catechetical programs, which 75 percent of dioceses provide (see Table 1).

Another constituency that many dioceses focus on is families and children. Half of dioceses offer some type of parental support or resource for

families affected by disabilities, and six in ten dioceses offer some school support for children with disabilities. Seven in ten dioceses have a non-parish-based school associated with the dioceses. Among those dioceses with non-parish-based schools, almost all include children with physical disabilities (97 percent), 84 percent include children with intellectual disabilities, and 82 percent have support staff to help students with disabilities in at least some of their schools. Despite this evidence that schools are making an effort to include children with disabilities, only 73 percent of dioceses say that the schools' budgets include salaries or resources related to accommodating children with disabilities in at least some of their schools. This means that some schools are working to include children with disabilities despite the fact that they are not planning for this financially. CARA's first survey of parishes noted that parish schools are also facing this challenge. Many parish schools make provisions to include children with disabilities but do not necessarily have the funds to cover all of the expenses associated with these efforts. Other services that more than half of dioceses focus on include pastoral services (60 percent) and services for the Deaf (51 percent).

DIOCESAN SACRAMENTAL AND CATECHETICAL RESOURCES

Among the nine in ten dioceses that have sacramental norms or guidelines, 65 percent have norms or guidelines addressing issues related to disabilities. Many dioceses (70 percent) also recommend sacramental preparation and other catechetical resources for students with disabilities. Of those dioceses, around 40 percent have their own materials that they recommend. Other resources that dioceses recommend also correspond to the resources that parishes report using. More than half of dioceses recommend Loyola Press and Our Sunday Visitor resources, which are also the most commonly reported resources used by parishes for children with disabilities.

Eight in ten dioceses also offer resources to help parishes include people with disabilities in sacraments and to assist families with children with disabilities who are participating in the sacraments. One diocese describes how it combines both, “monthly Sunday social for people with special needs, an Annual Day of Reflection, and Annual Liturgy and Celebration [along with] weekly respite Saturdays. . . .” They go on to explain that the service is for and supported by parishes in the diocese. Seven in ten dioceses also make accommodations for participants with disabilities in catechetical ministry training and liturgical ministry training.

In 1978, the U.S. Bishops wrote: “It is essential that all forms of the liturgy be completely accessible to people with disabilities, since these forms are the essence of the spiritual tie that binds the Christian community together. To exclude members of the parish from these celebrations of the life of the Church, even by passive omission, is to deny the reality of that community. Accessibility involves far more than architectural alterations to parish buildings. Realistic provision must be made for persons with disabilities to participate fully in the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations such as the sacraments of Reconciliation, Confirmation and Anointing of the Sick.”³³ In terms of inclusion of those with disabilities in the sacramental life of the Church, the responses on the diocesan level are heartening.

DIOCESAN PROGRAMS/SUPPORT GROUPS

In addition to programs, dioceses were asked about support groups to help people with disabilities and their families congregate. Four in ten dioceses offer support groups or programs for people with disabilities, and three in ten offer support groups for families with members who have disabilities (see Table 2). In comparison, slightly less than one in ten parishes offers support groups for people with disabilities or their families. Three in ten dioceses offer programs to help people with addictions, while half of parishes reported offering similar programs. The data suggest that dioceses are more likely than parishes to provide support groups for people with disabilities, and parishes are more likely than dioceses to have programs that help people with addictions (many parishes host AA or similar addiction recovery programs). To assist them in serving people with disabilities, 78 percent of dioceses work with a Catholic organization and half work with a non-Catholic organization.

In 1978, the U.S. Bishops called for programmatic action at the diocesan level: “The clergy, religious and laity engaged in this [disabilities] program should help the parish by developing policy and translating it into practical strategies for working with individuals with disabilities. They should serve as advocates, seeking help from other agencies. Finally, they should monitor public policy and generate multifaceted educational opportunities for those who minister to and with people with disabilities.”

TABLE 2. PROGRAMS/SUPPORT GROUPS OFFERED BY
DIOCESAN AND PARISHES
Percentage responding “Yes”

	Dioceses	Parishes
Does the diocese/parish work with any Catholic organizations to serve people with disabilities?	78%	62%
Does the diocese/parish have any programs they refer people with disabilities to?	63	—
Does the diocese/parish work with any non-Catholic organizations to serve people with disabilities?	50	34
Does the diocese/parish offer support groups/programs for people with disabilities?	37	15
Does the diocese/parish offer any support group for families with members who have disabilities?	27	13
Does the diocese/parish offer any programs to help people with addictions?	27	50

DIOCESAN DEPARTMENTS

Dioceses were asked if they have an office that is in charge of services for people with disabilities. Roughly four in ten dioceses have such an office; half of them having only one full- or part-time person working in them. When asked in which department the office was housed, very few departments have disabilities in the title; many of them are located in a catechetical or evangelization department. More dioceses have a Deaf ministry (46 percent) than have an office in charge of services for people with disabilities (38 percent). Of those dioceses with a Deaf ministry, a slight majority (56 percent) maintain it as a separate ministry from the disabilities office. Four in ten dioceses have someone with disabilities who works in a diocesan office, although dioceses that have an office for people with disabilities are more likely than those without such an office to have people with disabilities working in the diocesan office.

CARA’s recent special report on parishes and disabilities found that parishes with “the most accommodations for people with disabilities are also most likely to have at least one person with a disability serving on a parish committee or filling a ministerial role. It seems that active inclusion of those with disabilities in decision-making positions or positions where their perspective can be heard has a high correlation with whether the parish will accommodate parishioners with disabilities.” The case seems to be the same with diocesan offices, and there is room for improvement and growth in this area, both in the number of disabilities offices and the number of persons with disabilities working at the diocesan level.

DIOCESAN EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

Generally, dioceses accommodate people with disabilities at diocesan events, as shown in Table 3. When planning diocesan-wide events, 82 percent of dioceses make provisions for active partici-

pation for people with disabilities and 69 percent make provisions for active participation for people who are Deaf.

Four in ten dioceses sponsor conferences or training to help accommodate people with disabilities, or for the families of people with disabilities. Even if the dioceses do not sponsor the conference, 59 percent of dioceses report that their employees attend conferences or training offered by another organization to help accommodate people with disabilities. Most of these employees attend these trainings voluntarily, since, less than one in ten dioceses requires their employees (9 percent) or parish employees (5 percent) to participate in training to learn how to accommodate people with disabilities. Even if the diocese does not require employees to attend trainings, employees who work for a diocese that sponsors a conference for accommodating people with disabilities are more likely than those who work for a diocese that does not sponsor such a conference to attend these conferences, regardless of sponsor. These results suggest a correlation between encouraging disabilities training at the diocesan level and participation in disabilities conferences and training at the parish level.

TABLE 3. **CONFERENCES AND EVENTS**
Percentage responding “Yes”

In planning for diocesan-wide events, are provisions made for active participation for people with disabilities?	82%
In planning for diocesan-wide events, are provisions made for active participation for people who are Deaf?	69
Do employees/volunteers in the diocese attend conferences/training with another organization to help accommodate people with disabilities (including online)?	59
Does the diocese sponsor conferences/training for diocesan employees/volunteers to help accommodate people with disabilities?	40
Does the diocese sponsor conferences/events for families who have members with disabilities?	38
Does the diocese require diocesan employees to participate in training to learn how to accommodate people with disabilities?	9
Does the diocese require parish personnel to participate in training to learn how to accommodate people with disabilities?	5

DIOCESAN ARCHITECTURAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Dioceses were asked about architectural accommodations. Almost all dioceses (98 percent) have a cathedral that is wheelchair accessible, and nine in ten (89 percent) have offices that are wheelchair accessible. Almost all (94 percent) have reserved parking for people with disabilities at their diocesan offices. Almost four in ten dioceses report that diocesan offices were originally built to accommodate people with disabilities. A majority (61 percent) say the diocesan offices have been renovated and better accommodations installed. One in ten dioceses state that the best resource their

diocese can provide to people with disabilities is better accommodations and accessibility into and around diocesan buildings. Greater accessibility may lead to more people with disabilities using diocesan buildings for ministerial purposes and perhaps finding employment opportunities there as well.

Part II: Catholic Charities Accommodation and Service to People with Disabilities

The way we experience illness and disability is an index of the love we are ready to offer.

POPE FRANCIS, JUBILEE MASS OF THE SICK AND DISABLED, JUNE 12, 2016

CATHOLIC CHARITIES SERVICES/PROGRAMS

The services that dioceses and Catholic Charities provide are linked and in some cases a diocese or Catholic Charities agency will not provide a service because they know the other already provides it. With this in mind, Catholic Charities agencies were also surveyed to gain a better perspective of the services that the Catholic Church is providing people with disabilities across the United States (see Table 4). The most common services offered by Catholic Charities agencies (77 percent) are services or programs for people with mental illnesses. When asked about specific services, more than half of Catholic Charities agencies report offering counseling, mental health services, financial services, and housing services. This response differs significantly from that of dioceses, where 42 percent provide mental illness services.

About four in ten agencies offer services for those with aging-related disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or war-related injuries or illnesses. One-third of agencies offer services to people with chronic illnesses or physical disabilities, and just over one-quarter offer services to people on the autism spectrum or with sensory disabilities.

When asked what they thought the best resource the agency offers to people with disabilities, one-quarter say mental health counseling, followed by housing and residential programs. These categories were also the programs respondents would put more money toward if funding were available: one-third of respondents say that if more funds were available, they would offer resources for better mental health and substance abuse counseling, and two in ten state they would offer better housing programs.

One respondent wrote: “We have a robust workforce development program for people with disabilities. We provide assessment, vocational job training, job coaching, supported employment, extended employment, long-term follow along, and more. We are

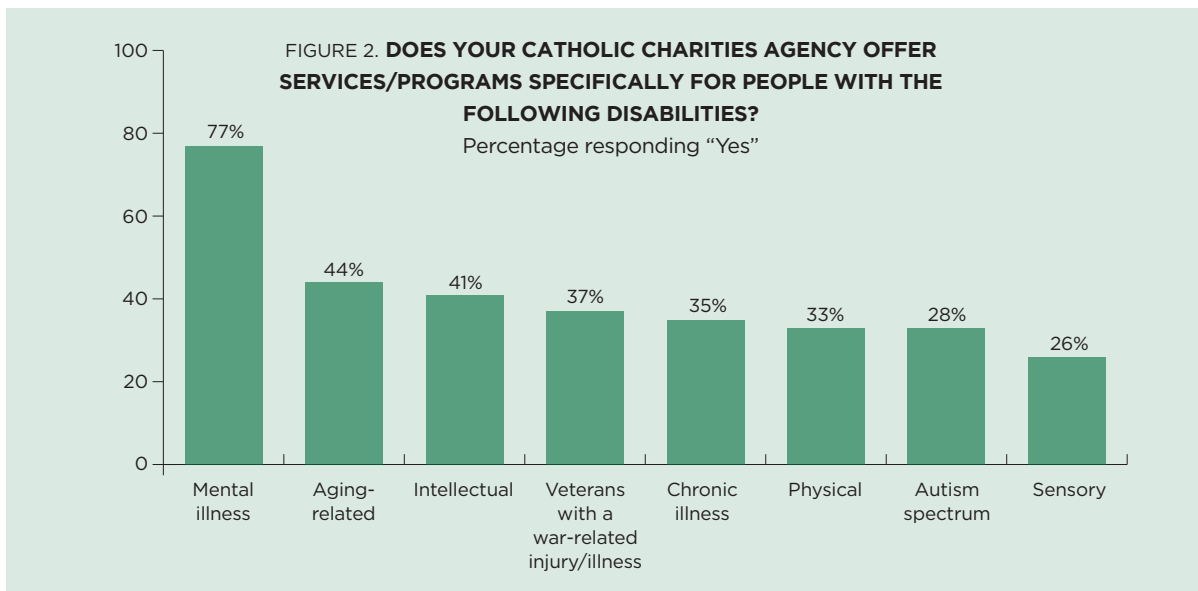


TABLE 4. ARE ANY OF THESE SERVICES/PROGRAMS OFFERED BY YOUR AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES APART FROM SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DIOCESE?

Offered by at least one in four agencies

Counseling services	72%
Mental health services	65
Financial assistance	62
Housing	53
Family/parents support	49
Aging-in-place services	42
In-home support programs	41
Employment assistance	37
Pro-life advocacy	33
Training programs	33
Transitional services	32
Day programs	32
Disability advocacy	32
Respite care	30

proud of our work helping people with disabilities find and retain employment, especially among individuals in the inner city who have very low income and have historically had limited opportunities.”

CATHOLIC CHARITIES PROGRAMS/SUPPORT GROUPS

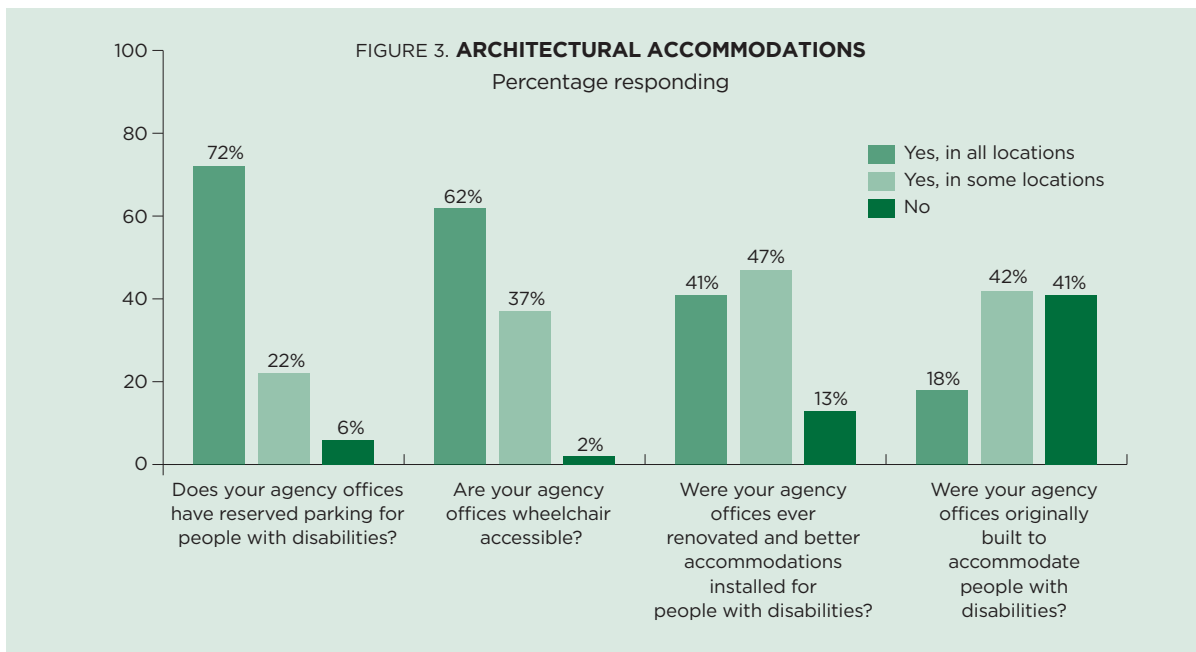
In addition to the programs and services listed in Table 4, the survey

also asked about programs and support groups that help people with disabilities and their families to meet each other and congregate. Four in ten Catholic Charities agencies (39 percent) offer programs to help people with addictions, and three in ten offer programs for veterans with disabilities (28 percent). Two in ten agencies state that their best resource for people with disabilities is the services offered to veterans and seniors. Two in ten agencies offer support groups for people with disabilities and/or their families. To help provide these and other programs offered to people with disabilities, four in ten agencies (37 percent) work with Catholic organizations and slightly more (43 percent) work with a non-Catholic organization.

CATHOLIC CHARITIES DEPARTMENTS AND EVENTS

To ascertain how the Catholic Charities agencies organize these services, the survey inquired if they have offices responsible for services for people with disabilities. Eight in ten Catholic Charities agencies (81 percent) employ people with disabilities, although less than two in ten (18 percent) have a department that is responsible for services for people with disabilities. These departments are larger than the diocesan offices that are responsible for services to people with disabilities, with half of them having five or more full-time people. One in ten agencies (10 percent) has a ministry specifically for people who are Deaf. The majority (58 percent) of Deaf ministries are separate from the disabilities departments.

When planning for Catholic Charities events, seven in ten (69 percent) agencies make provisions for active participation by people with disabilities. In contrast, one-quarter (27 percent) make provisions for active participation by people who are Deaf. Half of agencies report that their employees attend conferences to help train them to accommodate people with disabilities, though just one-third of agencies (34 percent) report that they require their employees to attend such conferences. Almost two in ten agencies say that if the funds were available, they would offer more opportunities to train their staff to accommodate people with disabilities. As reported in the diocesan findings, if an agency sponsors a conference to inform people how to accommodate people with disabilities, then their employees are more likely to attend such a conference, regardless of the sponsor. The agency is creating a culture in which accommodation for people with disabilities is the norm. One-quarter of agencies (24 percent) sponsor conferences for employees to help accommodate people with disabilities, and two in ten sponsor conferences for families who have members with disabilities.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES ARCHITECTURAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Almost all Catholic Charities agencies have architectural accommodations for people with disabilities to access their agency offices. Almost all agencies (98 percent) have at least some offices that are wheelchair accessible and more than nine in ten agencies (94 percent) have reserved parking for people with disabilities for at least some of their offices (see Figure 3). The agencies have also made improvements to architectural accommodations since they were built. Four in ten agencies did not have any offices that were originally built to accommodate people with disabilities, and 88 percent of agencies have renovated at least some of their offices to install better accommodations. Some agencies admit that there is still work to be done; one-quarter say that if more funding were available, they would use it to improve the accessibility of their facilities.

Part III: Combined Services/Programs

This section combines responses from dioceses and Catholic Charities agencies to provide a more holistic view of how dioceses are accommodating and serving people with disabilities. Responses from Catholic Charities agencies are combined with those of the diocese in which the agency is located. To combine the responses, the positive response is given priority. If either the diocese or Catholic Charities responded “yes” to a question, then the combined answer is “yes.” The combined response indicates that the diocese offers the service in some capacity, either through the diocese or through Catholic Charities. For the remainder of the report, “combined respondents” refers to the diocese and the corresponding Catholic Charities agency within the territory.

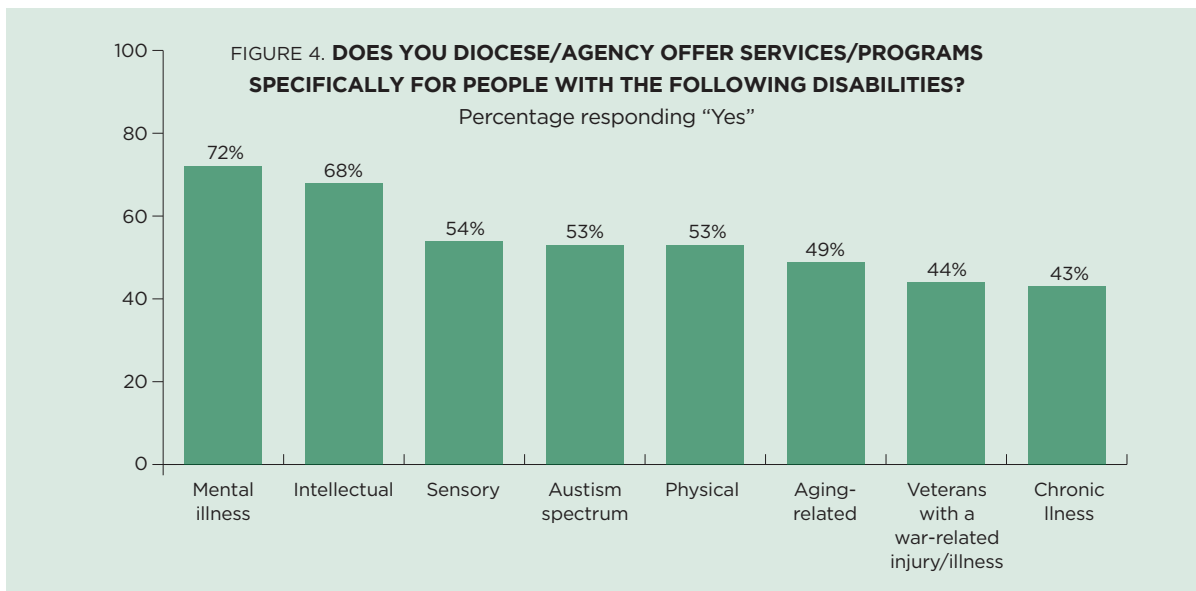
COMBINED SERVICES/PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Among the disabilities that combined respondents focus on when providing services, seven in ten offer services for people with mental illnesses (72 percent) or with intellectual disabilities (68 percent). Services for people with mental illnesses are mainly

TABLE 5. ARE ANY OF THESE SERVICES/PROGRAMS OFFERED AT THE DIOCESE/AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

Offered by at least one in four combined respondents

Pro-life advocacy	71%
Family/parents support	68
Counseling services	67
Catechetical programs	65
Mental health services	59
Schools	56
Financial assistance	53
Disability advocacy	53
Pastoral services	51
Housing	48
Services for Deaf people	44
In-home support programs	38
Aging-in-place services	38
Day programs	35
Employment assistance	33
Summer camps	32
Prenatal diagnosis support	32
Recreational programs	30
Respite care	29
Legal support	29
End-of-life care	27



provided by Catholic Charities, while services for people with intellectual disabilities are mainly provided by the dioceses. More than half offer services for people with sensory disabilities, autism, and physical disabilities. All of these services are provided by the dioceses more often than Catholic Charities. Less than half offer services for people with aging-related disabilities, war-related injuries or illnesses, or chronic illnesses. All of these services are provided more by Catholic Charities than by dioceses.

When asked about specific services (Table 5), the service most frequently provided for people with disabilities is pro-life advocacy, which is mainly provided by dioceses. Around two in three combined respondents provide family/parental support, counseling services, and catechetical programs. More than half of combined respondents provide mental health services, schools, financial assistance, disability advocacy, and pastoral services for people with disabilities. Dioceses are more likely than Catholic Charities to provide schools, disability advocacy, and pastoral services, while Catholic Charities agencies are more likely than dioceses to provide mental health services and financial assistance.

PROGRAMS/SUPPORT GROUPS

The programs provided by the greatest proportion of combined respondents are those that help people with addictions, which are provided by Catholic Charities more than by dioceses. More than four in ten combined respondents (45 percent) sponsor conferences or trainings to help their employees accommodate people with disabilities, and four in ten (39 percent) sponsor conferences for families who have members with disabilities. Four in ten combined respondents (39 percent) also offer support groups for

TABLE 6. PROGRAMS/SUPPORT GROUPS
Percentage responding "Yes"

Does the diocese/agency work with any Catholic organizations to serve people with disabilities?	75%
Does the diocese/agency work with any non-Catholic organization(s) to serve people with disabilities?	60%
Does the diocese/agency offer programs to help people with addictions?	45%
Does the diocese/agency sponsor conferences/training for diocesan/Catholic Charities employees/volunteers to help accommodate people with disabilities?	45%
Does the diocese/agency sponsor conferences/events for families who have members with disabilities?	39%
Does the diocese/agency offer support groups/programs for people with disabilities?	39%
Does the diocese/agency offer support groups/programs for families with members who have disabilities?	34%

people with disabilities, and one-third (34 percent) offer support groups for families with members who have disabilities. To help deliver these and other services, three in four combined respondents (75 percent) work with Catholic organizations to serve people with disabilities, and six in ten (60 percent) work with non-Catholic organizations to do so.

Four in ten combined respondents (38 percent) have an office responsible for services for people with disabilities, and four in ten (40 percent) have a Deaf ministry. Both of these are provided by dioceses more often than by Catholic Charities.

Next Steps and Findings

The surveys provide a useful picture of the services and accommodations provided by dioceses and Catholic Charities across the United States to people with disabilities.

Areas in which Diocesan Chancellors say additional resources are needed:

- Training for staff
- Catechetical and pastoral programs
- Visual and Deaf resources
- Family and caregiver support

Areas in which Catholic Charities Directors say additional resources are needed:

- Mental health and substance abuse
- Family assistance
- Accessibility and transportation
- Housing programs
- Recreational programs
- Staff training
- Assistive devices

When asked about the best aspects of their current programs and the services they would improve if additional resources were available, responses often overlap. The subjects that come up most for both responses among diocesan staff are catechetical programs, visual and hearing services, and family support programs. The subjects that come up most for both responses among Catholic Charities agencies are mental health counseling, housing programs, and family assistance. This suggests that dioceses and Catholic Charities are focusing on providing one specific set of resources and may not be considering what other resources might be most beneficial or necessary for people with disabilities.

The main findings from the survey include:

- Dioceses and Catholic Charity agencies with the most accommodations for people with disabilities are also most likely to have an employee with a disability. The active inclusion of those with disabilities has a high correlation with providing programs and services for people with disabilities.
- Dioceses that sponsor conferences or trainings to help accommodate people with disabilities have more people attending such conferences, whether sponsored by the diocese or others.

The diocese simply creates an awareness of people with disabilities and people respond.

- Almost all dioceses and Catholic Charities agencies have found ways to make their buildings and facilities accessible to people with physical disabilities.
- There is ample room for dioceses and Catholic Charities to more explicitly focus on disabilities as only two in five dioceses and one in five Catholic Charities agencies have an office or department responsible for services for people with disabilities.
- Six in ten dioceses have sacramental norms or guidelines addressing issues related to disabilities.
- Dioceses focus much of their attention on services and programs for people with intellectual and sensory disabilities and those on the autism spectrum.
- Catholic Charities agencies focus much of their attention on services and programs for people with mental illnesses and aging related disabilities.

While the report contains considerable information about how dioceses and Catholic Charities provide accommodations and resources for people with disabilities, there is still much to learn on the subject, as well as what people with disabilities need and want from the Church. The latter, in particular, is ripe for study.

About this Study

Potomac Community Resources Inc. (PCR), the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD), the Department of Special Needs Ministries of the Archdiocese of Washington, and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington commissioned the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate to learn from dioceses and Catholic Charities across the nation about their current activities for an inclusion of people with disabilities.

Questionnaires were emailed and mailed to the 196 chancellors of dioceses and 164 directors of Catholic Charities agencies. CARA received responses from 142 out of 196 chancellors, for a response rate of 72 percent, and responses from 131 out of 164 Catholic Charities directors, for a response rate of 80 percent.

NOTES

1. For the duration of the report, the term “diocese” refers to the archdioceses, dioceses, archeparchies, and eparchies
2. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/14/a-closer-look-at-catholic-america/>
3. Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities on November 16, 1978.



CARA was founded by Catholic leaders in 1964 to put social science research tools at the service of the Catholic Church in the United States. For information on CARA and its mission of research, analysis, and planning, contact:

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