



Western Reserve

Area Agency on Aging

Celebrating Disability Pride Month

Historically, people with disabilities have faced exclusion and misconceptions. Yet, disability is a natural part of the human experience, touching the lives of most of us directly or through a loved one, and plays a crucial role in shaping our interaction with the world around us. People with disabilities make up the biggest and most varied group in the society, with different abilities, ages, races, ethnicities, religions and backgrounds.

Disability Pride Month is celebrated every July to commemorate the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990, which was a landmark legislation for disability rights. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in many areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and access to many public and private places that are open to the public. The purpose of the law is to ensure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. In short, the ADA gives civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities.

The month is also a time to celebrate disability culture, and recognize the knowledge and experiences of disabled people, and involve non-disabled people in respectful and constructive conversations about disability and ableism (intentional or unintentional discrimination or prejudice against disabled people). Disability Pride encourages individuals to celebrate one's disabled identity and bring awareness to the obstacles that still exist. The 2024 theme for Disability Pride Month, *We Want a Life Like Yours*, spotlights the role inclusion plays in helping all people with disabilities succeed in life. Today, there are many organizations and advocacy groups that work to make this theme a reality by supporting people with disabilities in schools, at work, and in their homes and communities.

At Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging (WRAAA), our mission is to provide choices for people to live independently in the place they want to call home. In practice, we connect older adults and people with disabilities to Ohio waiver programs to meet their long-term care needs in their homes, rather than a hospital or nursing facility. However, the severe shortage of direct care workers due to low wages across the industry has made it challenging for waiver participants to receive this fundamental assistance. WRAAA, along with other Ohio organizations and advocacy groups, worked for over two years in local communities and at the State capital in Columbus to push for higher Medicaid reimbursement rates. Higher rates would allow for home care providers to put more dollars towards retaining and recruiting staff, meaning more individuals could get the care they need. After WRAAA and others presented their evidence and client stories to Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Medicaid, the State voted to increase reimbursement rates, allocating \$3.4 billion per year across a network of more than 200,000 active providers.

Advocacy. Assistance. Answers on Aging and Disabilities.



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Advocating at various levels of government is just one way to celebrate disability pride, but there are many other ways to support the disability community.

- Start by learning about the disability experience; meet people with disabilities, listen to their stories, and educate yourself about disability rights in the United States.
- Teach your children, other family members, and friends to acknowledge and include disabled people to help foster inclusion for future generations.
- There are also likely to be Disability Pride Month events in your area—attending can be a great way to show your support and disability pride!

Finally, if you are a person with disabilities, share your disability story. What are you proud of? What do you want people without disabilities to know? Take to social media or get involved in your community to add your voice to the conversation and help others learn from your experiences.

For questions about disability programs, services, and community events in your area, contact WRAAA's Aging and Disability Resource Center. We, alongside our provider partners, are here for you to provide advocacy, assistance, and answers on aging and disability.

Happy Disability Pride Month!

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