

Disseminating Preventative Health Education to People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



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BACKGROUND

More than 1 in 4 U.S. adults reports having some form of a disability.¹ People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) experience disproportionate health disparities with poorer overall health outcomes compared to the general population.^{2,3}

Special Olympics Washington (SOWA) works to close these gaps through inclusive health screenings and athlete-centered education, including a peer education program led by Health Messengers – athletes with IDD who advocate for healthy behaviors within their communities.



To build on this work, additional resources are needed: on-hand communication guidance for volunteers during screenings and tools to help athletes apply nutrition and food budgeting skills in everyday life. The recent conclusion of SNAP-Ed further highlights this need, as many people with IDD rely on food assistance programs.

GOALS

- Improve volunteer communication with people with IDD during health screenings
- Strengthen Health-Messenger capacity to deliver nutrition and food budgeting education
- Support athlete independence in everyday nutrition and food budgeting decisions

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Communication Reference Sheet

Provides screening-specific communication strategies and examples to improve understanding for people with IDD.

1. Identified key barriers affecting understanding
2. Reviewed SOWA volunteer training
3. Literature review on communication strategies
4. Developed evidence-based recommendations, including scripts, examples, and do's and don'ts

Grocery Shopping Handbook & Athlete Guide

Equips Health Messengers and athletes with practical tools for nutrition and food budgeting education

1. Applied prior literature review findings for accessible content
2. Literature review on grocery shopping strategies for PWIDD
3. Examined impacts of the Big Beautiful Bill and SNAP-Ed discontinuation on food access for people with IDD
4. Interviewed Health Messenger
5. 18-page handbook for Health Messengers & linked resources
6. Condensed supplemental version for athletes

NEXT STEPS

- Distribute and train Health Messengers on the grocery shopping handbook
- Pilot all materials at the upcoming SOWA Spring Games & health screening event
 - Collect feedback from volunteers and Health Messengers
- Integrate the reference sheet into existing volunteer onboarding materials
- Monitor policy changes affecting nutrition education, healthcare access, and disability benefits and update materials accordingly

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was a privilege to work with Special Olympics Washington on this project. A sincere thank you to Emma Richardson for her mentorship and guidance throughout this process, to Julie Larson for her clinical expertise and insight into the screening process, and to the Health Messengers whose input and lived experience shaped these resources.

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