

Inclusive Language in **MEDIA**

A Canadian Style Guide

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Words that Matter:

Respect, Inclusivity and the Power of Language

Language is powerful and as a media maker, it is important to be mindful that media is consumed by millions of people every day. Journalists should recognize the influence they have when they report on disability and avoid reinforcing stigma and stereotypes. Ableist language is the casual use of language, sometime intentionally and often inadvertently that refers to a person with a disability. This casual use of language is very common, very negative and stigmatizes people with disabilities.

Media practitioners and communicators in general ideally strive to use the most accurate and current terminology. Consequently, those engaged in media creation and distribution are urged to also engage in an ongoing process that thoughtfully evaluates language and avoids inaccurate, archaic and offensive expressions that perpetuate negative stereotypes. Language, after all, can reinforce a dominant viewpoint when it comes to disability. It is important to be mindful of the fact that there is a growing presence of disability in Canadian society reflected in the rapid growth of disability experienced by an aging population and a disproportionately high rate of disability experienced by Indigenous people.

But what words and phrases do we use? Not everyone can ever be expected to agree on every term or every word. It is important to note that terminology is always changing and that there is no “one size fits all” solution. As well, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada reminds us that language is always evolving as people with disabilities witness greater equality, independence, and full participation in all aspects of Canadian society.

In Canada, we all expect that everyone – the media in particular – will use respectful language when talking about our lives. For people with disabilities, there is a clear expectation that words and images will not stigmatize or reinforce outdated stereotypes.

Finally, it’s important to remember that self-identification is key. When you are talking to or about someone, ask them how they identify or how they would like to be referred to. Above all else, this may be the most important, respectful and effective way to establish who and what you are talking about.

In addressing and describing disability:

- Respect the person
- Emphasize abilities
- If the story is not about “disability”, do not focus on disability
- Do not focus on a disability
- Bypass condescending euphemisms
- Do not portray people with disabilities as heroic overachievers or long-suffering saints
- Avoid sensationalizing and negative labeling
- Do not equate disability with illness

The ultimate goal must always be accurate, clear, positive and respectful language that establishes best practices and fosters inclusive thinking.

Ways with Words and Images:

Suggestions for Media Interviews with People/Persons with Disabilities

Government of Canada guidelines suggest that before an interview, you follow these recommendations:

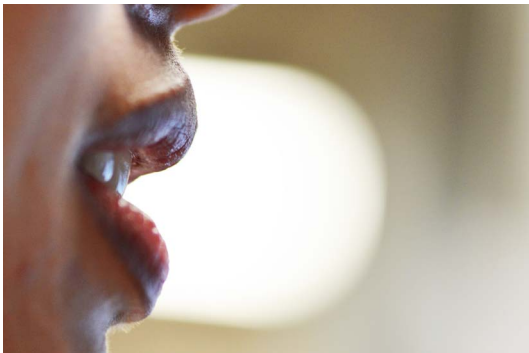
Interview a person with a disability as you would any other person. Avoid putting a person with a disability on a pedestal and using patronizing terms.

Ask yourself: Am I reporting on this piece because it involves a person with a disability or because the issue and related circumstances are relevant to the general population? Where it makes sense journalistically in terms of the story being told, focus on personal characteristics that aren't related to disability, such as artist, professional, mother, etc.

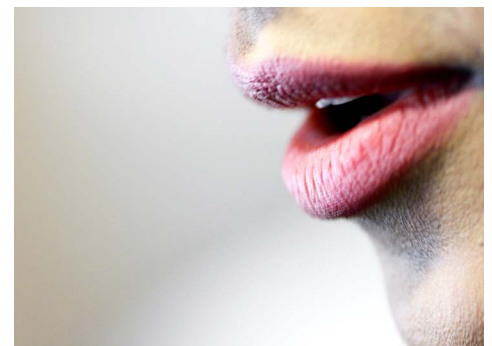
Ask yourself: If it did not involve a person with a disability, would I still want to write it?

Ask yourself: Is a reference to a disability necessary to the story?

Follow these suggestions to improve communications with persons with disabilities.



- When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to them, rather than through a companion, support person, interpreter, or intervener who may be there.
- Relax. Be yourself. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along" that seem to relate to the person's disability.
- Offer assistance to a person with a disability if you feel like it, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help. Listen to any instructions the person may want to give.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things said or done. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.
- In the piece you reported on, do not use subjective descriptors such as "unfortunate", "pitiful", or "sad" when describing people with disabilities.
- Avoid references that cause discomfort, guilt, pity, or insult. Words like "suffers from", "stricken with", "afflicted by", "patient", "disease", or "sick" suggest constant pain and a sense of hopelessness. While this may be the case for some individuals, disability is a condition that does not necessarily cause pain or require medical attention.



- Avoid words such as “burden”, “incompetent” or “defective”, which suggest that people with disabilities are inferior and should be excluded from activities generally available to people without disabilities.
- In visual treatments (e.g., television and photographs), do not dwell on technical aids or adaptive devices unless, of course, the purpose is to introduce or discuss a particular aid or device. After the interview, ask yourself: Have I used the correct terminology (e.g. “uses a wheelchair” not “confined to a wheelchair”)? Is this piece accurate and unbiased? Have I avoided sensationalism?
- When capturing images, don’t look down on someone, be mindful and respectful of camera angles, sound and lighting. Don’t focus on the wheelchair, mobility device or crutches only. When we do this, we contribute to viewing/perceiving people with disabilities as ‘different’.

“Language is always evolving as people with disabilities witness greater equality, independence, & full participation in all aspects of Canadian society.”



At a Glance: 10 Guiding Principles

The following are basic guidelines for quick reference

- 1** – Do not refer to disability unless it is crucial to your subject and relates to the full understanding of your listener or reader.
- 2** – When you are referring to disability, be clear about terminology.
- 3** – Ask the person you are interviewing/speaking with about how they wish to be described.
- 4** – Avoid portraying a person or their accomplishments as superhuman or exceptional. This inadvertently implies that a person with a disability lacks or has very limited skills, talents, or unusual gifts.
- 5** – Do not use subjective terms such as “afflicted with”, “victim of”, “troubled with”, “suffering from” and so on. Such expressions convey negative connotations. It is preferable to use an expression such as “a person who has (a specific disability)”.
- 6** – Avoid labeling persons and putting them in categories, as in “the handicapped”, “the disabled”, “the deaf”, “the blind”, “the learning disabled”, and so on. This implies that disabled people are a monolithic group.
- 7** – Emphasize the individual not the disability. Rather than saying “handicapped person”, use terms such as “people/persons with disabilities” or “a person with a disability”. Some people prefer identify first language and use the term “disabled person”. Identity first language reflects the “Social Model of Disability”, which defines disability as something created by external factors (social and physical barriers) therefore one is disabled by the environment, not solely a condition of their body.
- 8** – Emphasize abilities. For example, instead of saying “Dev is confined to his wheelchair”, use a positive expression of ability such as “Dev uses a wheelchair”. Or, “Mackenzie is partially sighted” rather than “Mackenzie is partially blind”.
- 9** – Avoid comparing a disability with a disease. Do not refer to a person with disability as a “patient” unless he/she is under medical care and it is important to the context of the story.
- 10** – Recognize that disabled people are inherently worthwhile, educate yourself about disability rights and images and confront disability stereotypes and oppression.

Glossary of Terms and Suggested Language

In consultation with people with disabilities and lived experience, the following are some suggested words and phrases for use by media makers when talking about accessibility and disability. This glossary has been compiled from media language guides in Canada including the Canadian Press Stylebook and the CBC Language Guide. As well, numerous Canadian, U.S. and international media agencies and experts were consulted.

Word usage changes as do attitudes and approaches. For these reasons, this glossary should always be considered a work in progress.

Ability

Term

Relating to the power, capacity or competence to do or act physically, mentally, legally, etc.

Background

Ability is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as “the quality or state of being able; competence in doing something; natural aptitude or acquired proficiency”.

Recommendation

Avoid categorizing people with disabilities as either super-achievers or tragic figures. Choose words that are non-judgmental, non-emotional, and are accurate descriptions. Avoid using “brave”, “courageous”, “inspirational”, or other similar words to describe a person with a disability. Remember that the majority of people with disabilities have similar aspirations as the rest of the population, and that words and images should reflect inclusion in society, except where social isolation is the focal point. Oftentimes when we suggest that someone with a disability is ‘inspirational’ it infers that their accomplishments are not valid because of their disability.

Able-bodied

Term

A perception that is subjective and contextual relating to having a strong, healthy body and being physically fit.

Background

Usually, this term is unnecessary. People are assumed to be able-bodied unless a relevant disability is mentioned. This term also implies

that people with disabilities don't have the ability to use their bodies. "Non-disabled" is a more accurate term.

Recommendation

Instead of using the general term "able-bodied", it's often best simply to specify the opposite of the disability already cited (e.g. people who can see, people who can hear, people who can walk). Never call those without disabilities "normal", which implies that others are "abnormal". The word "typical" can be used to describe a non-disabled condition.

Ableism

Term

Relating to a mindset that discriminates against people with disabilities. Ableism may be defined as a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others, according to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Background

Ableism gives priority to non-disabled experiences and points of view in a conscious or unconscious way. It may be embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities. Ableist attitudes are often based on the view that disability is abnormal (see above) rather than an inherent and expected variation in the human condition.

Recommendation

What is recommended here is mindfulness. People with disabilities are a diverse group, and experience disability, impairment and societal barriers in many different ways. Disabilities are often invisible and episodic, with people sometimes experiencing periods of wellness and periods of disability. Mindfulness in reporting means not subscribing to ableist attitudes that cast disabled people in stereotypical or inaccurate ways.

Abnormal, Normal

Terms

Relating to a thing or person that is not normal, average, typical, or usual; something that deviated from a standard.

Background

The word “abnormal” is offensive when applied to people. It suggests those with disabilities fail to live up to some ideal norm or standard. It also implies that they are different in ways beyond a specific disability.

Recommendation

Avoid using the word ‘normal’, as in normal behavior. Instead use ‘typical’(typical behavior). Never refer to people without disabilities as normal. The term can be used in general descriptions of specific abilities (e.g., normal vision, near-normal hearing), since it can helpfully and neutrally indicate ranges.

Accessible, Accessibility, Inclusive Design, Universal Design

Terms

Relating to that which can be reached, used, entered, obtained, attained, seen or heard. In terms of language relating to disability, these are broad terms that apply specifically to doors with ramps, transit stations with elevators, washrooms with large stalls and automatic door opening buttons, accessible parking, captioned video and plain language as well as to all published and broadcast content. The focus is on accessibility as the solution, not disability as the problem.

Background

People with disabilities face many kinds of barriers every day including communication, physical, systemic or attitudinal barriers. Implementing effective inclusive design – for policies, programs, procedures, standards, requirements and facilities – reduces the need for people to ask for individual accommodation. In broadcast communication, this overall approach would include generating captions and transcripts, designing for screen readers and text-to-speech applications, using speech recognition systems, language translation applications, and using web accessibility related tools.

Recommendation

The important thing here is to make sure the context is clear. Otherwise, use the terms “accessible parking”, “accessible parking permits”, etc., to refer to specific spots/passes for those who qualify. Avoid the dated term “handicapped parking”.

Afflicted by, Suffers from, Suffers with, etc.

Terms

Relating to being in distress, troubled greatly or grievously.

Background

These are considered pitying phrases at best and judgmentally inaccurate descriptions at worst (not all people with disabilities suffer or have a reduced quality of life).

Recommendation

Use neutral verbs such as “has” (she has cancer, he has AIDS) and “is” (she is deaf, he is blind, they use a wheelchair) and avoid using descriptions that connote pity.

Birth defect, Congenital defect, Deformity

Terms

Relating to any physical, mental, or biochemical difference present at birth.

Background

These are words and phrases that have traditionally been used to describe medical conditions often stemming from birth.

Recommendation

Instead of these words, use phrases such as “person with a disability”, “person who has a congenital disability”. It’s better to use specific statements (blind since birth, born without arms, unable to walk since birth, born with a facial difference that makes it difficult to speak etc.). Do not use terms such as “birth defects” or “birth deformity”, which are considered offensive because they are seen to dismiss individuals as defective rather than to neutrally report information and tends to frame disability as a defective and negative experience.

Blind

Term

Relating to an inability to see, lacking a sense of sight, being sightless. Also, relating to an unwillingness to accept, perceive or understand.

Background

Total lack of vision represents the extreme end of the scale of a

condition that we call blindness, according to Web Accessibility In Mind, a non-profit organization based at Utah State University. As it turns out, most people who are considered legally blind do have some vision. Individuals of all ages may have this disability, whether due to genetics, traumatic injuries, or illnesses.

Recommendation

Use this word with limitations. It is fine as an adjective (a blind person, the blind community) or as an attributive noun (people who are blind). But, generally avoid using this word as a noun after the definite article “the”, (the blind), which suggests they constitute a separate class within society. Avoid using “vision impaired” and “visually impaired”. Blindness should never be equated with darkness. And, avoid using “blind” as an adjective (e.g. She was blind to the idea.).

Brain injury, Brain Damaged, Traumatic Brain Injury

Terms

Describes a condition where there is temporary or long-term disruption in brain function resulting from injury to the brain.

Background

The U.S. Mayo Clinic states that currently there is not one single definition of a concussion, minor head injury, or mild traumatic brain injury that is universally accepted.

Recommendation

Use “person with a brain injury” or “employee with a traumatic brain injury”. Do not say “brain damaged”.

Challenged

Term

Relating to a condition of being deficient or lacking.

Background

This has been a traditional synonym for describing disability. It is a word that is usually imposed on people with disabilities, rather than a word used to describe themselves. The Oxford Dictionary suggests that when used with a preceding adverb (physically challenged), the intention was to give a more positive tone than terms such as “disabled” or “handicapped”. However, the term rapidly became used by intention to make fun of people in a paternal or even ironic tone.

Examples include “cerebrally challenged”, “conversationally challenged”, and “follicularly challenged”.

Recommendation

Do not use the phrases “mentally challenged”, “physically challenged”, “intellectually challenged” as they are euphemistic.

Cognitive Disability

Term

The concept of cognitive disabilities is extremely broad, and not always well defined, according to Web Accessibility In Mind. In loose terms, a person with a cognitive disability has greater difficulty with one or more types of mental tasks than the average person.

Background

Most cognitive disabilities have some sort of basis in the biology or physiology of the individual. The connection between a person’s biology and mental processes is most obvious in the case of traumatic brain injury and genetic disorders, but subtle cognitive disabilities often have a basis in the structure or chemistry of the brain.

Recommendation

It is recommended to not use this terminology unless a person identifies themselves as having a cognitive disability.

Confined, Bound

Terms

Relating to being limited or restricted.

Background

These have been traditional, if weak, synonyms for describing a limitation stemming from disability.

Recommendation

Avoid phrases such as confined to a wheelchair and wheelchair bound. Instead, use phrases such as “a person who uses a wheelchair” or “wheelchair user”. People are not “confined” or “bound” to a wheelchair as this connotes that they never get out of their wheelchair.

Crazy, Insane, Lunatic, Moron, Idiot, Imbecile, Mental, Feeble-Minded, Lame

Term

Words that have historically been used for behavior and diagnosis associated with mental health issues developmental and intellectual disability.

Background

The language used during the late 1800s and early 1900s categorized individuals based on their presumed degree of disability. "Feeble-minded" was sometimes used as a general term to describe a person with a developmental or intellectual disability. Most of the time, however, "feeble-minded" meant a person with a very mild intellectual impairment - individuals who today would not be considered to have a developmental disability. People with increasingly severe developmental disabilities were classified as "morons", "imbeciles", and "idiots". The word "idiot" referred to people with the most severe intellectual impairments. Other terms commonly used at the time were "mentally defective" and "subnormals". "High grades" and "low grades" were used to denote a person's ability. At the time, these words were accepted medical terminology. From our perspective today, these terms are harsh and derogatory.

Recommendation

These words have been historically and or currently used to marginalize, other, and oppress disabled people and are often used in common speech as throwaway adjectives, descriptive words or insults.

Avoid using these words except when they are tied to an historical medical diagnosis. In describing a person, describe them as a "person with mental health issues" or a "person with developmental disabilities" or "a person with intellectual disabilities". Or, specify the type of disability, for example, a person who has depression or a person who has schizophrenia or a person with a mood disorder but only if it is relevant to the story, or if the person has identified their experience for themselves.

Crip, Crippled

Terms

Words that have traditionally been used in describing an aspect of disability.

Background

Stemming from Middle English cripel and Old English crypel, relating to the concept of “to creep.”

Recommendation

This word is offensive and should be avoided. However, be aware that the term “Crip” can be an insider, self-identification language term, akin to LGBTQ people calling each other “Queer”, but it is not always appropriate language for non-disabled people

Deafblind

Term

A person who is deafblind has a substantial degree of loss in sight and hearing, the combination of which results in significant difficulties in accessing information.

Background

Deafblindness is a distinct disability. Deafblindness is a combined vision and hearing disability. It limits activities of a person and restricts full participation in society to such a degree that society is required to facilitate specific services, environmental alterations and/or technology.

Recommendation

Use “person who is deafblind” or “person with deafblindness”.

Deaf

Term

The Canadian Association of the Deaf-Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC) recognizes a person to be medically/audiologically deaf when that person has little or no functional hearing and depends upon visual rather than auditory communication. Visual communication includes Sign language, lip-reading, speech reading, and reading and writing. Auditory communication includes voice, hearing, and hearing aids and devices.

Background

The CAD-ASC also accepts the definition developed by Gallaudet University in the United States: Anyone who cannot understand speech (with or without hearing aids or other devices) using sound alone (i.e. no visual cues such as lip reading) is deaf.

Recommendation

Acceptable as an adjective in most cases (a deaf person, the Deaf community) or as an attributive noun (people who are deaf). Generally, avoid using this word as a noun after the definite article (the deaf), which suggests they constitute a separate class within society.

Never use the offensive phrase, “deaf and dumb.” Also, avoid “deaf-mute”, which is inaccurate, (some people who are deaf can speak) and belittling. Similarly, the label “mute” is considered belittling. Consider framing the detail in a less negative or judgmental way by emphasizing what a person can do, as opposed to what they cannot (that they communicate with Sign language, with a voice synthesizer, with pen and paper, with the help of a computer). Also, be mindful that different Sign languages are used around the world.

The terms Sign language interpreter or Signer are common and understandable. Be mindful of language clarity: a deaf Signer for example may themselves be deaf, or may work as an interpreter but not be deaf.

Deaf Culture

Term

A culture is generally considered distinct when it has its own unique language, values, behavioral norms, arts, educational institutions, political and social structures, organizations, and peripherals (such as ethnic clothing, rituals, or special/unusual possessions). By this measure, Deaf people have a unique culture which is indicated by the capital-D Deaf term.

Background

Within the Deaf culture, being deaf is a non-issue and for many it is viewed as part of a positive cultural identity. A person’s status within the culture depends not upon their amount of hearing loss but upon their attitude towards the elements of the Deaf culture, involvement in the local Deaf community, and skill in Sign language.

Recommendation

The Canadian Association of the Deaf-Association des Sourds du Canada encourages hearing society to cease looking upon people who are deaf as being inferior in need of medical cures. Culturally Deaf people have a clear sense of identity and a tremendous feeling of belonging to a community. They should be recognized and celebrated as a socio-cultural minority.

Developmentally Impaired

Term

A term that's often too vague to be helpful since it can cover everything from physical and mental development to emotional maturity, acquisition of basic social skills, etc.

Background

There's debate over how to apply this phrase accurately (e.g., restricted to those under 18 or also for certain adults).

Recommendation

What is preferred is more specific language that conveys relevant details about a disability, such as "intellectual disability" or "developmental disability".

Disabled, Disability

Terms

Relating to a functional and/or social limitation or restriction of an individual's ability to perform an activity.

Background

The word "disabled" is an adjective, not a noun. People are not conditions. Avoid using the term "the disabled" but rather "people with disabilities", "persons with disabilities" or "disabled people".

Recommendation

Use disabled as an adjective (disabled Canadians) or as an attributive noun (people who are disabled). Avoid using disabled as a noun after the definite article (the disabled), which suggests they constitute a separate class within society. Distinguishing between specific disabilities (functional limitations, such as not being able to walk) and diseases or other medical conditions (arthritis, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's) is sometimes important, since there can be a range of impairment that changes over time. Don't use the dated terms "handicapped" and "handi-capable".

Disadvantaged

Term

Relating to the lacking of normal or usual necessities and comforts of life, such as affordable housing, education, etc.

Background

In terms of disability, this becomes an unclear euphemism to describe a perceived, evident or suspected limitation.

Recommendation

Avoid this term as many people are disadvantaged.

When reporting on specific problems facing people with disabilities (lack of accessible public transit, affordable housing, poverty), it's fine to point out specific obstacles or disadvantages.

Handicapped

Term

Relating to a disadvantage (see above).

Background

Stemming from the phrase “cap in hand” and also from “hand in cap” or “hand i’cap”. Although once very common, this term is now dated and considered offensive, with overtones of “cap-in-hand” begging. This word also exaggerates limitations and it is important to note that a person who uses a wheelchair is not handicapped in a workplace if there’s a ramp at the door and accessible facilities, including washrooms.

Recommendation

Do not use “handicapped” or “handi-capable”. Use the word “disabled” and its variations (e.g., disabled person, person with a disability).

Hard of Hearing

Term

Any person who has a hearing loss and whose usual means of communication is spoken language. This definition includes a broad spectrum of hearing loss, including those who are late-deafened and those deaf in childhood and educated orally.

Background

People who are hard of hearing people use speech and residual hearing to communicate, supplemented by communication strategies that may include speechreading, hearing aids, a signed language and communication devices.

Recommendation

Use the term “person with hearing loss” or “person who is hard of hearing”

■ Intellectual Disability, Developmental Disability

Terms

These terms denote a shift away from old, medical labels such as “mental retardation,” and match disability advocacy (i.e. Community Living) descriptions of intellectual disability. In some provinces “developmental disability” is preferred, while in others “intellectual disability” is preferred, though these are often used interchangeably without much contestation. These are sometimes used as vague euphemisms for a mental health issue, intellectual disability, developmental disability or general cognitive impairment.

Background

In some provinces in Canada, “developmental disability” is preferred, while in others “intellectual disability” is preferred, though these are often used interchangeably without much contestation. These are sometimes used as vague euphemisms for a mental health issue, intellectual disability, developmental disability or general cognitive disability.

Recommendation

The term “intellectually disabled” is generally a poor choice because it refers to intelligence only. Use the terms “person with an intellectual disability” or “person with a developmental disability”.

■ Invalid, Lame

Terms

Relating to being infirm, unwell or an inability to perform a function or care for oneself.

Background

Lame traces its origins to Old English and Old High German where words such as “lama” and “lam” meant “to break down”. The Cambridge Dictionary defines an invalid as “someone who is sick and unable to care for himself or herself, especially for a long time”.

Recommendation

Avoid using these words. Disabled people are not broken and can often take care of themselves.

■ Low Vision

Term

Low vision can occur at any age and is most often due to a change in central vision.

Background

Occasionally, it is associated with loss of side (peripheral) vision when it is close to centre and sometimes with loss of colour vision or difficulty adapting to changes in brightness within the field of vision. Loss of vision may also result from cataract and glaucoma, or from damage to the optic nerve, which carries visual images to the brain.

Recommendation

It is fine to use as an attributive noun (people who have low vision).
Avoid vision/visually impaired.

Mental Health, Mental Illness

Terms

"Mental illness" is the term used to refer to mental health issues that are diagnosed and treated by mental health professionals. In the medical professions, they are also called "mental disorders" but this is not a term that is very comfortable to most people. This would include such issues as depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, social phobia, eating disorders, schizophrenia, and personality disorders.

Background

The term "mental health issues" generally refers to changes that occur over a period of time or that significantly affect the way a person copes or functions. When these changes in thinking, mood, and behavior are associated with significant distress and impaired functioning, it may be that the person is experiencing a mental illness.

It is important to recognize that mental wellness and mental health issues or mental illness are part of an ever changing and dynamic continuum.

It is estimated that one in five Canadians or close to 6 million people are likely to experience a diagnosable mental illness during some period in their lives (from Health Canada; Canadian Psychiatric Association). Mental illness is the second leading cause of hospital use (from Canadian Psychiatric Association).

Recommendation

Do not use offensive slang such as "mental", "crazy", "psycho", "nuts", "looney".

Non-disabled

Term

The preferred term when the context calls for a comparison between people with and people without disabilities.

Background

This term is in common usage today.

Recommendation

Use non-disabled or people without disabilities instead of “healthy”, “able-bodied”, “normal” or “whole”.

Retarded, Mentally Retarded

Terms

Words stemming from the word “retard” which simply means slow in Latin.

Background

The etymology is sometimes cited as an objective and effective way to communicate delayed mental development. However, these words have historically been a medical label applied to some people. Today, many see these words as ableist slurs, comparable to sexist and racial slurs.

Recommendation

Terms such as “retardation” and “mental retardation” are now considered highly offensive despite the fact that they remain in common usage in some parts of the world. These words are not acceptable in media coverage and should be avoided.

It also doesn't matter that the clinical diagnosis of mental retardation is still found in respected medical journals. Constructions such as “mentally retarded” are instantly linked to “retard” and other highly objectionable slang. Instead, use “developmental disability” or “intellectual disability”.

Service Animals

Term

This term describes an animal that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities.

Background

In addition to guiding people who are blind, these service animals may alert people who are deaf, pull wheelchairs, alert and protect a person who is having a seizure, service dogs that are be companions of autistic children, or remind a person with mental health issues to take prescribed medications, or calm a person with post-traumatic stress disorder during an anxiety attack. Service animals can include miniature horses, ferrets, parrots, potbelly pigs, cats and dogs. The term “Guide dog” refers to a legally-recognized group of service dogs trained to lead or guide people who are blind, deaf-blind or partially sighted.

Recommendation

Use the terms “person using a service animal”, “person using a Guide Dog”, “service animal”, “service dog” or “guide dog”. Do not use the phrase “seeing-eye dog”.

Special Needs

Term

We all have the same basic needs - food, shelter, to be loved and how we access those needs may vary.

Background

A term that has been widely used by education systems and therefore remains part of everyday language, according to Simi Linton, a prominent thinker about disability issues. The term is seen as patronizing and has been used to make fun of disabled people.

Recommendation

Avoid this vague euphemism unless officially used in a title, (i.e. where “Special” is part of the title of an institution). We all have special needs. Saying that someone has “special needs” raises more questions than it answers. Saying that someone uses a wheelchair, needs a voice synthesizer to speak or is a non-reader makes clear what you are saying.

Speech Impairment, Speech Impediment

Terms

Relating to being diminished or unable to speak.

Background

These are acceptable but still vague terms.

Recommendation

These terms are only acceptable if a speech impairment is a relevant detail to the story. Otherwise use specific information, such as a stammer, a cleft palate, a strong lisp, etc., but these kinds of details must be relevant. And never assume someone has a specific condition. Someone who stutters a few times during one speech you happened to hear may, in fact, not have a speech impediment.

Spinal Cord injury

Term

Describes a condition in which there has been permanent damage to the spinal cord, resulting in some degree of paralysis.

Background

Quadriplegia denotes loss of function in all four extremities. Paraplegia refers to loss of function in the lower part of the body only. In both cases the individual might have some function in the affected limbs.

Recommendation

Use “man with paraplegia”, “woman who is paralyzed” or “person with a spinal cord injury”. Don’t say “cripple” (see Cripple above) or “handicapped” unless the person in question themselves uses insider, self-identification language.

Suffers from, Suffers with

Terms

Relating to a condition wherein a being undergoes or feels pain or distress.

Background

Words and phrases sometimes used in description of a disability.

Recommendation

Although it is possible for disabled people to be suffering, making an assumption that disabled people are suffering because of their disability is ableist. It is important never to refer to a person as “suffering from...” unless they describe themselves using those words.

Survivor/Victim

Terms

Relating to a person who either continues to function or prosper in spite of opposition, hardship, or setbacks – or to one who succumbs to opposition, hardship, etc.

Background

Term used by people to affirm their recovery from or conquest of an adverse health condition such as cancer survivor, burn survivor, brain injury survivor, psychiatric survivor or stroke survivor.

Recommendation

A psychiatric survivor considers a diverse population of individual people that may currently access mental health services, may be ex-patients of mental health services or may be survivors of psychiatric interventions.

Victim is a passive term that makes the subject of the story seem helpless, although sometimes this helplessness is used intentionally (i.e. “She was the victim of psychiatric treatment”). It is important to check with the person before describing them as a victim.

There are many more terms used to describe accessibility and disability. A number of comprehensive guides can be found in the bibliography.

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Organizations

Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians

PO Box 20262, RPO Town Centre

Kelowna, British Columbia V1Y 9H2

1-800-561-4774

<http://www.blindcanadians.ca/>

Balance for Blind Adults

2340 Dundas Street West

Unit G-06

Toronto, Ontario M6P 4A9

(416) 236 1796

<http://www.balancefba.org/>

Canadian Association for Community Living

4700 Keele Street, Kinsmen Building, York University

North York, Ontario M3J 1P3

416-661-9611

www.cacl.ca

Canadian Association of the Deaf

251 Bank Street, Suite 203

Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1X3

613-565-2882

TTY: 613-565-8882

www.cad.ca

Canadian Council of the Blind

396 Cooper Street, Suite 401

Ottawa, Ontario K2P 2H7

613-567-0311 or 1-877-304-0968

www.ccbnational.net

Canadian Deafblind Association (National)

1860 Appleby Line

Unit 14, Box 421

Burlington, Ontario

Canada L7L 7H7

1-866-229-5832

<http://www.cdbanational.com/>

Canadian Deafblind Association (Ontario Chapter)

50 Main Street

Paris, ON N3L 2E2

519-442-0463

TTY 519-442-6641

http://www.cdbaontario.com/index_e.php

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association

2415 Holly Lane, Suite 205

Ottawa, Ontario K1V 7P2

613-526-1584 or 1-800-263-8068

TTY: 613-526-2692

www.chha.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association

180 Dundas Street West, Suite 2301

Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z8

416-484-7750

www.cmha.ca

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

1929 Bayview Avenue

Toronto, Ontario M4G 3E8

416-486-2500

www.cnib.ca

Canadian Paraplegic Association

1101 Prince of Wales Drive, Suite 230

Ottawa, Ontario K2C 3W7

613-723-1033

www.canparaplegic.org

Council of Canadians with Disabilities

926-294 Portage Avenue

Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0B9

204-947-0303

www.ccdonline.ca

Guide Dog Users of Canada

214 Rose St

Barrie, ON L4M 2V1

1-877-285-9805

<https://gduc.ca/gduc/member/articleList.asp?articleType=1>

Humber Student Wellness and Accessibility Centre

2nd Floor Learning Resource Commons, North Campus

205 Humber College Boulevard

Toronto, Ontario

M9W 5L7

416-675-6622

<http://www.humber.ca/student-life/swac/accessible-learning>

Learning Disabilities Association of Canada

250 City Centre Avenue, Suite 616

Ottawa, Ontario K1R 6K7

613-238-5721

www.ldac-acta.ca

Ontario Human Rights Commission

180 Dundas Street West, 9th Floor

Toronto, ON M7A 2R9

416-326-9511

1-800-387-9080

TTY 416-326-0603

TTY 1-800-308-5561

info@ohrc.on.ca

People First of Canada

120 Maryland Street, Suite 5

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204-784-7362

www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca

National Educational Association of Disabled Students

4th Level Unicentre

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6

613-526-8008

www.neads.ca

The Mood Disorders Society of Canada

3-304 Stone Road West, Suite 736

Guelph, Ontario N1G 4W4

519-824-5565

www.mooddisorderscanada.ca

Schizophrenia Society of Canada

50 Acadia Avenue, Suite 205

Markham, Ontario L3R 0B3

905-415-2007

<http://www.schizophrenia.ca>

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