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NON-APPARENT DISABILITIES FACT SHEET:

Definitions and Categories

Introduction

Many disabilities are not immediately apparent, yet they profoundly impact the lives of those who live with them. Non-apparent disabilities challenge traditional perceptions of disability, highlighting the importance of fostering greater understanding and inclusion in all areas of life, including healthcare and the workplace.

Understanding the Term

The use of terms like "invisible" or "hidden" disability carries unintended implications. This fact sheet uses the term *non-apparent disability* to affirm the presence and experiences of individuals whose disabilities may not be outwardly visible.

Legal Context

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects individuals with non-apparent disabilities, recognizing that major life activities extend beyond physical functions to include cognitive, emotional, and social capacities.

A Note on Terminology

While this fact sheet uses **non-apparent disabilities**, many individuals prefer **invisible disabilities** to emphasize the struggle of being overlooked by support systems.

Terminology is personal, and both terms are valid.

Recognizing Non-Apparent Disabilities

Non-apparent disabilities are conditions that are not immediately visible to others but significantly impact daily life. These include chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, neurodivergent traits, and other invisible impairments. While individuals with these disabilities often face unique challenges, understanding and recognizing these conditions are the first steps toward fostering inclusion and accessibility.

Challenges Faced by Individuals with Non-Apparent Disabilities

Because these disabilities are not outwardly visible, individuals often encounter:

- **Stigma:** Being judged or treated unfairly because of their condition.
- **Doubt:** Others may not believe their disability is real or serious.
- **Barriers to Support:** Getting accommodations at work or school can take extra effort.
- **Emotional Stress:** Having to explain their needs over and over can be exhausting.

Broad Categories of Non-Apparent Disabilities

Non-apparent disabilities span diverse conditions affecting physical, cognitive, emotional, and systemic health. Common categories include:

- **Physical and Mobility-Related Disabilities:** Chronic pain, autoimmune disorders, and genetic conditions.
- **Mental Health and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities:** Depression, anxiety, PTSD, ADHD, and autism spectrum disorders.
- **Internal Systemic Disabilities:** Cardiovascular, respiratory, and digestive system disorders.

For a partial breakdown of these categories and examples, see the accompanying table.

Broad Category	Examples of Conditions	Description
Physical and Mobility-Related Disabilities	Chronic Pain Disorders (e.g., Fibromyalgia, CRPS), Autoimmune Disorders (e.g., Lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis), Genetic Disorders (e.g., Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome)	Conditions that cause chronic pain, fatigue, or physical limitations, affecting movement and daily activities.
Mental Health and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities	Mental Health Conditions (e.g., Depression, Anxiety, PTSD), Autism Spectrum Disorder, ADHD	Disorders impacting mood, behavior, social interaction, and cognitive processes, often without visible signs.
Cognitive and Neurological Disabilities	Learning Disabilities (e.g., Dyslexia), Neurological Conditions (e.g., Epilepsy, Traumatic Brain Injury), Sensory Processing Disorders	Conditions that affect cognitive functioning, learning, attention, memory, or sensory processing abilities.
Internal Systemic and Organ-Related Disabilities	Respiratory Conditions (e.g., Asthma, COPD), Cardiovascular Conditions (e.g., POTS), Endocrine Disorders (e.g., Diabetes, Hypothyroidism)	Disorders affecting internal bodily systems that lead to fatigue, shortness of breath, or other chronic symptoms.
Digestive and Nutritional Disorders	Gastrointestinal Disorders (e.g., IBS, Celiac Disease, IBD), Nutritional Deficiencies from conditions like Crohn's Disease	Conditions affecting the digestive system, often causing pain, discomfort, and dietary restrictions.



Broad Category	Examples of Conditions	Description
Immunological Disabilities	Immunodeficiency Disorders (e.g., HIV/AIDS, Primary Immunodeficiencies)	Disorders that weaken the immune system, leading to increased susceptibility to infections and health complications.
Chronic or Remissive Conditions	Cancer (in remission or under chronic management), Tuberculosis (latent TB, TB-related health effects)	Conditions that may be in remission or managed but can still lead to chronic symptoms, fatigue, and other health challenges.

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