

The Arc Minnesota

Position Statement — Disability & Racial Justice

Summary

The Arc Minnesota believes disability and racial justice efforts must be connected to all movements for freedom and justice. These movements must be focused on ending ableism, discrimination, and oppression of disabled people.

We all have a role to play in disability and racial justice. We must work together to end ableism and racism. We must build a world where all bodyminds are respected, valued, and equal.

Many Queer, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color with disabilities have been, and still are:

- believed to be less than human
- considered not worthy of living
- excluded from society
- killed because of their identities

Because of negative, harmful, and oppressive beliefs about race and disability, disabled people are not given equal rights.

Disabled people with intersecting identities have been subject to the greatest violence and oppression of ableism. They have the most at stake in ending ableism and racism.

We urge everyone to learn with us about how to support justice movements that are led by QBIPOC who have disabilities. As we all continue to learn, we will create a more inclusive society that aligns with the principles of disability and racial justice.

Issue

The history of disability in the United States is connected to white supremacy.

When Western Europeans created colonies on this continent, they killed many of the Indigenous people who lived here. They also enslaved People of Color. Indigenous and enslaved people were believed to be less worthy, less smart, and less capable. People who were Queer, Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (QBIPOC) were treated as less than human.

This is true for disabled people throughout history, too. Many people with disabilities have, and still are:

- believed to be less than human
- believed to be unable to make decisions or communicate what is important to them
- considered not worthy of living
- excluded from society
- killed because of their identities

These are just some of the types of harm that disabled QBIPOC experience. There are many others. Because of negative, harmful, and oppressive beliefs about race and disability, disabled people are not given equal rights. Society and legal systems have prevented people with disabilities from having power. Too often, people who do not have disabilities make important decisions about disabled people, without their consent.

Many movements for rights and justice do not include people with disabilities. Even the disability rights movement has been based on a competitive access model, in which people constantly prove their need for support. These movements have not valued nor included people who identify as disabled and:

- People of Color
- People who have had their ancestral lands stolen
- Immigrants
- Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and people with other gender and sexuality identities (2SLGBTQIA+)
- People living in poverty
- People who are without shelter
- People who have been in prison or jail

Disabled people with intersecting identities have been subject to the greatest violence and oppression of ableism. They have the most at stake in ending ableism and racism.

Position

The Arc Minnesota believes disability and racial justice efforts must be connected to all movements for freedom and justice. These movements must be focused on ending:

- ableism, or beliefs and systems that favor people who do not have disabilities
- discrimination, or unfair treatment because of someone's identity
- oppression, or unjust treatment that gives some people more power and control than others

Systems and social change must be led by disabled people because they have power and know what is best for themselves. When people who have disabilities lead and share their own stories, others understand it is possible for them, too.

The disability justice movement values and includes all people. It reflects the relational worldview held by Indigenous people throughout the Americas, in which every person is valued and included.

The Arc Minnesota is being informed by the principles of the disability justice movement. Diverse leaders of the disability justice group, [Sins Invalid](#), created these principles. They made the principles to guide their work. We use these definitions to inform us:

- **Intersectionality**

- The lives of people who have disabilities are shaped by:
 - race
 - gender expression
 - where they live
 - time in history
 - and more
- All of these parts of a person's life make up their identity.
- Sometimes, people are treated unjustly because of their identities.
- **Intersectionality** is a word to explain the ways that people are oppressed because of their different identities. Everyone has their own unique experience with privilege and oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first person to use that word.

- **Leadership of those most impacted**

- Being led by and learning from diverse disabled people is critical. Those who are most impacted by the violence and oppression of ableism have lived experience that must guide all efforts toward systems and social change.
- Together, these leaders can learn from each other, build community, and break down barriers.

- **Anti-capitalist politics**

- **Anti-capitalist politics** is a term to explain a world that respects the power, value, and worth of people who have disabilities.
- Some people have more money than others. Having more money often gives people more power.
- Many people who have disabilities do not have much money. Our system is set up in a way that does not value who they are and what they can do. This leads to low wages and less opportunity for people who have disabilities.
- The value and worth of people who have disabilities is not connected to how much money they make, whether they work, and how much they can "get done."

- **Commitment to cross-movement solidarity**

- People who have disabilities need to be included as leaders of all justice movements
- **Cross-movement solidarity** is a term to explain that disability justice must include all other types of work to create positive change in society.
- Movements have to be intersectional to make sure that all parts of people's lives are honored and respected.
- We must work to change many systems at the same time to end all challenges and barriers.
- White people who have disabilities need to:
 - work to end ableism and racism

- advocate for freedom for all people
- **Recognizing wholeness**
 - It is important to accept everyone for who they are on the inside and outside, without judgement.
 - People who have disabilities must be respected and valued for everything that makes them who they are. It is important to honor and embrace disability as part of a person's identity that gives them power.
 - **Bodymind** is a word used by leaders in the disability justice movement as a way to show the connection between our bodies and our minds. Our body and our mind cannot be separated. The bodyminds of people who have disabilities are whole and valued.
- **Sustainability**
 - Advocating for ourselves and others helps create real change in our communities. Change can be hard and does not happen overnight. It can take a long time.
 - **Sustainability** is a word to explain that we must have energy, drive, and patience. We must work for change and advocate for disability justice, no matter how long it takes.
- **Commitment to cross-disability solidarity**
 - **Commitment to cross-disability solidarity** is a term to show that all people who have disabilities must work together to make change.
 - Each person, no matter their disability, must have the option to be part of the disability justice movement.
 - When people who have different disabilities work together, nothing can stop us from creating change.
- **Interdependence**
 - **Interdependence** is a word to explain that everyone needs support sometimes.
 - We must work together to meet each other's needs. We must create a community that supports one another.
 - People who have disabilities must be able to choose from lots of options for how they get support from their communities.
 - Government and disability services are only part of this support network.
- **Collective access**
 - Each person's bodymind works differently, and access needs are part of life for everyone that must be respected.
 - **Collective access** is a term to explain that communities must be built so everyone is included in ways that are accessible for them. Information must be shared in ways that are accessible to everyone, too.

- **Collective liberation**

- **Collective liberation** is a term to explain that leaders of the disability justice movement are working to build a world where every body/mind is free, respected, and valued.
- It is our responsibility to make sure everyone has a chance to live the life they want. We must make sure that no one is left behind.

We all have a role to play in disability and racial justice. We must work together to end ableism and racism. We must build a world where all body/minds are respected, valued, and equal.

As The Arc Minnesota aligns with the disability and racial justice movements, we will:

- learn from people who have diverse lived experience in ways that feel accessible to them, and value their expertise, time, and capacity
- create welcoming environments where all people and their specific access needs and accommodations are met
- use our platform in ways that help elevate the leadership of those most impacted and distribute power
- challenge ourselves and others to confront racism and ableism by assessing the ways we have perpetuated white supremacy internally and externally
- support disability & racial justice leaders by fighting for systems and social change through public policy, legislative and grassroots advocacy, and allyship in broader justice movements

Disability and racial justice work is ongoing and will change often. The Arc Minnesota will include actions to align with disability and racial justice in our organization's strategic plan, yearly organizational goals, and team and individual workplans. As we learn from people with lived experience and grow as an organization, we will change how we do this work to better reflect what is needed.

We urge everyone to learn with us about how to support justice movements that are led by QBIPOC who have disabilities. As we all continue to learn, we will create a more inclusive society that aligns with the principles of disability and racial justice.

Approved by The Arc Minnesota Public Policy Committee on November 29, 2021.