

Foreword

At the 20th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), there is much to celebrate regarding the economic gains of individuals with disabilities. The protections against discrimination based on disability created by the passage of the ADA in 1990 and the ADA Amendment Act in 1998 have opened up opportunities in housing and employment, significantly increased the accessibility of public places, and helped us all focus on people and their talents, rather than their differences. But there is still much to be done to promote self-sufficiency for Americans with disabilities and the kinds of opportunities in employment, savings, and housing that are enjoyed by their peers without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities still report lower incomes, higher unemployment, and lower usage of savings, investment, and other financial services and products.

An emerging group of stakeholders is learning to combine the health and human services expertise of disability service organizations, the development finance and asset-building knowledge of the community development sector, and the financial resources and market knowledge of the financial services industry to create products, services, programs, and policies designed to strengthen economic opportunities for Americans with disabilities.

The business case for getting involved is simple. This is a large market, representing over 54 million people (35 million who report a severe disability) with hundreds of billions of dollars in purchasing power. In terms of public policy, expanding economic opportunity for people with disabilities would promote equality and could lead to cost savings by helping individuals work and save at higher rates. This market is not only underserved (e.g., few savings and investment products are designed for it) but also underdeveloped (e.g., funding streams for housing are fragmented); thus, there is ample opportunity here for community development finance organizations to apply their market-building expertise.

In February 2010, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, The Disability Opportunity Fund, and Wall Street Without Walls sponsored a forum in Washington, DC titled *Opportunities for Community Development Finance in the Disability Market* to discuss how to leverage the resources of different sectors to bring more Americans with disabilities into the financial mainstream. The Boston Fed solicited a series of papers on housing, asset building, and employment to serve as background material for the conference. Those papers are presented here.

The trend in disability housing toward supports and services being provided in community-based residences or within one's own home has resulted in a large unmet demand for affordable, accessible, community-based housing. David Braddock opens the publication by showing trends in federal, state, and municipal spending for services to people with disabilities. The data identify a strong shift away

from institutional and nursing facility care toward community-based residential services and supports, especially for intellectual and developmental disabilities. He argues that this shift has resulted in unmet demand for community residential services that the community development finance field can help address. Charles Hammerman and Samantha Bennett also point to the large unmet demand for affordable and accessible housing and suggest that the largest barrier to meeting this demand is capital. Like Braddock, they argue that Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are uniquely positioned to provide the needed capital and expertise. Sue Swenson explains that a barrier to developing the community-based housing market for people with developmental disabilities is a scarcity of data supporting market segmentation. She provides sketches of disability consumers to illustrate the range of preferences and needs among these individuals. She also explains how stakeholders like CDFIs, other housing experts, and disability advocates can apply traditional marketing disciplines to create market segmentations with currently available public data.

Several challenges currently limit the asset-building potential of people with disabilities. Johnette Hartnett and Tobey Davies discuss how asset and income limits for public benefits are disincentives to efforts to work and save. Serena Lowe and Alexander Reid also discuss these disincentives and explain that there are few savings tools designed for people with disabilities that have the kind of flexibility, portability, and tax advantages available to other Americans. In terms of efforts to strengthen asset building, Hartnett and Davies describe the preliminary results of a series of new asset-building efforts focused on the disability consumer: data collection, community-based partnerships between disability services organizations and community development groups to deliver free tax preparation assistance and asset building programs, and research investigating the effects of these types of programs and partnerships on the market participation of consumers. Lowe and Reid discuss current legislative proposals aimed at tackling policy disincentives and expanding savings options for this market.

Improving economic outcomes must involve increasing the employment rate for people with disabilities, which has remained largely unchanged over the last 20 years. Andrew Imparato, Andrew Houtenville, and Robin Shaffert describe the legal protections against discrimination in employment launched with the passage of the ADA and the ADA Amendment Act and point out that employment rates for people with disabilities have not significantly improved despite these legislative protections. They go on to describe new federal and private efforts to improve employment outcomes and put out a call for further action. Charles Riley argues that the public and nonprofit sectors will not be able to significantly improve the employment problem on their own, but that the participation of the private sector is necessary. He makes the case that companies should take action not because it is the “right thing to do,” but rather because a disability-forward corporate policy is good for business. He also describes a strategy for how companies, with support from nonprofit organizations, can tap the disability market.

Together with the conference presentations, this publication promotes a conversation on how community development organizations, the disability sector, and private companies including financial institutions can work together to strengthen economic outcomes for people with disabilities. We are pleased to provide a spotlight for the efforts and ideas described in the papers. Our hope is that highlighting them will spark additional conversations and motivate others to join the networks of people and organizations working to implement meaningful change.

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