**QUESTION 1: Do you have a clear and transparent process for making decisions on disability issues?**For example, how do you know/learn about disability issues and make decisions on the many policies that impact the one in five of Americans who have a disability? Have you studied the issues? Do you have a disability or a family member with a disability? Have you done meetings with disability leaders or citizens with disabilities? Do you have a disability advisor and/or advisory committee?

**ANSWER 1:**Yes. When Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 25 years ago, it was a landmark declaration of equality for people with disabilities. Today, as a result of that legislation, millions of people with disabilities are no longer denied the opportunity to get on a bus, go to a decent school, make a decent living, attend a baseball game, and live successful and productive lives. Instead of being isolated and hidden from society, kids with disabilities are now in classrooms all over America and graduating from high school and college with the respect and admiration of their classmates, teachers, and families.

This transformation in our culture and society did not happen by accident, and it did not happen overnight – it happened because a grassroots movement demanded change. Despite the progress that has been made over the past two decades, we unfortunately still live in a world where people with disabilities have fewer work opportunities and where the civil rights of people with disabilities are not always protected and respected.

It is precisely that grassroots approach that undergirds my campaign for the presidency. But it is not just my campaign that is grassroots – for my entire career in politics, I have gone about legislating in a grassroots manner, and that includes fighting to ensure that our society is one where persons with disabilities can live full and productive lives. I have always made it a point to hear from activists and stakeholders when legislating, and that is especially true when it comes to disability policy, from the time I was mayor of Burlington, Vermont throughout my congressional career, and now as a presidential candidate. I know that practicing democracy is a radical idea in some circles, but that is what my entire political career has been all about.

See more: <https://berniesanders.com/issues/fighting-for-disability-rights/>

**QUESTION 2: Do you have a proven record on improving or a plan to improve the lives of PwDs?**

**ANSWER 2:** Over the course of my career, I have championed issues affecting people with disabilities. The ADA was a major step forward for the American people; our job now is to not just to protect that landmark law, but to expand and strengthen it.

For instance, in 2008, I cosponsored legislation to reverse several court decisions that eroded the standards for determining who qualifies as individuals with disabilities under the ADA. Those rulings meant that millions of Americans facing discrimination are now excluded from ADA protection. The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 underscored Congress’ intent to reinstate a broad scope of protection for persons with disabilities under the ADA. The legislation would modify findings in the ADA that have been used by courts to narrowly interpret what constitutes a disability and lowers the burden of proving that one is “disabled enough” to qualify for coverage.

Just last year, as the lead Democrat on the Budget Committee, I fought against the Republican budget that would make lives much more difficult for persons with disabilities by throwing 27 million Americans off of health insurance, cutting Medicaid by $500 billion, turning Medicare into a voucher program, and making savage cuts in education, affordable housing, vocational assistance, and nutrition programs.

Instead of slashing Medicaid and privatizing Medicare, I believe the United States must join every other major nation on earth and recognize that health care is a right of citizenship for every American, regardless of age. That’s why I am fighting for a Medicare-for-all single-payer health care plan for every man, woman, and child in this country.

As part of the stimulus package in 2009, I helped fight for more funding for students with disabilities nationwide and in my home state. For Vermont, this included:

* $12.8 million in IDEA Part B grants to states, $458,150 to IDEA Part B Preschool Grants, and $1.06 million to IDEA Part C Grants to Infants and Families. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) grants are targeted to help special education students in Vermont schools.
* $900,000 for Vocational Rehabilitation programs will be used to provide training, assistance, and ongoing support to help persons with disabilities find employment in Vermont.
* $242,913 for the Vermont Center for Independent Living, which works to promote the independence and rights of Vermonters with disabilities.

See more:

* <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/stimulus-funds-to-strengthen-school-and-ease-vermont-budget-shortfall>
* <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/leahy-sanders-hail-senate-passage-of-bill-to-reverse-narrow-interpretations-of-americans-with-disabilities-act>
* <https://berniesanders.com/issues/fighting-for-disability-rights/>

**QUESTION 3: Do you have a plan to enable PwDs to have jobs, careers and to start their own businesses?**

**ANSWER 3:** Yes. In the year 2016, it is unacceptable that more than 80 percent of adults with disabilities are unemployed. We need to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and vocational education programs. We also need to expand funding for Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), which aim to provide “one-stop shopping” for information on long-term services and supports.

If we are serious about rebuilding the middle class, reducing income and wealth inequality, we have got to unlock the economic potential of persons with disabilities owned businesses. I strongly believe we need to promote the talent of PwD business leaders and foster the success of a new generation of entrepreneurs to expand the economy and create millions of new jobs. As President, I would expand access and opportunities for PwD-owned businesses to level the playing field and grow the economy in a fair way.

My Rebuild America Act would invest $1 trillion rebuilding our nation’s crumbling infrastructure and creating 13 million jobs in the process. We will make sure that standards and guidelines are in place to ensure many of those jobs are available to PwDs.

Other legislation I introduced would improve the Defense Department’s Transition Assistance Program by requiring the Department of Labor to provide returning service members with information regarding disability-related employment and education protections.

See more: <https://berniesanders.com/issues/creating-jobs-rebuilding-america/>

**QUESTION 4: Do you have a plan/commitment to reduce the stigmas about PwDs that are barriers to employment, independence and equality?**

**ANSWER 4:**Yes. For example, in 2014, I supported the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which took steps in the right direction to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in the workforce and be self-sufficient. Among the many positive provisions, WIOA seeks to increase competitive integrated employment and decrease the number of individuals in non-integrated employment. Further, WIOA seeks to limit the use of the subminimum wage, where individuals with disabilities are paid less than the minimum wage for the same work as their nondisabled peers. Additionally, 15 percent of Vocational Rehabilitation funding must be spent on transition services and half of the supported employment state grants must be to help youth with the most significant disabilities.

I will continue to fight for equal access and equal rights for people with disabilities. That’s why I strongly support the ratification of the critically important Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

See more: <https://berniesanders.com/issues/fighting-for-disability-rights/>

**QUESTION 5: Many people who are born with disabilities, especially minorities with learning and mental health differences, are not diagnosed and/or their disability issues go unaddressed. This leads to school dropouts and a “school to prison pipeline.” Do you have a plan to enable students with disabilities to get the services they need to succeed in school and life?**

**ANSWER 5:**Yes. To end the school-to-prison pipeline we must ensure that every child has a high-quality education that prepares them for success in life and the workforce by: tackling poverty through investing in schools and ensuring parents have good paying jobs, creating universal child care and pre-K, investing in our teachers and ensuring that every child has an excellent teacher, requiring states to put in their fair share of funding, ensuring that low-income, minority and children with disabilities are guaranteed an equal education, and supporting school strategies that integrate the community and wrap-around services.

Moreover, we must end the over-incarceration of nonviolent young Americans who do not pose a serious threat to our society. Our prisons should not be holding tanks for young people who our society has failed in so many ways.

I have a record of fighting for kids, including those with disabilities:

* Consistently pressed Congress to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). In 1975, when IDEA was passed, the federal government promised to contribute 40 percent of the additional cost of providing services to children with disabilities. Today the federal government’s contribution is less than half of what Congress originally intended, at 16 percent today.
* Strong track record of supporting robust federal investment in early education that specifically serves infants, toddlers, and preschool aged children with disabilities ([FY 15 Appropriations Letter](http://www.mnheadstart.org/PDF/Franken%20Lead%20FY15%20Early%20Childhood%20Appropriations%20Letter.pdf)).
* Supported efforts to reduce bullying and harassment that target students with disabilities, among others, by [co-sponsoring](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/311/cosponsors) the Safe Schools Improvement Act.
* Worked to [decrease exclusionary discipline](https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/ESSA_School_Discipline_120715_%28to_Donna%29.pdf) practices like suspension and expulsion through the recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ([ESEA Committee Vote](http://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-panel-advances-education-bill))
* Helped maintain transparency for accountability [disaggregating student outcome data](http://democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/sites/democrats.edworkforce.house.gov/files/Every%20Student%20Succeeds%20Act%20of%202015_Section%20by%20Section.pdf) – including students with disabilities – in ESEA’s reauthorization.
* Supported efforts to [reduce the use of seclusion and restraint](http://www.copaa.org/news/262994/-COPAA-Supports-ESSA-Amending-the-Elementary-and-Secondary-Education-Act.htm), which disproportionately impacts children with disabilities, in the recent reauthorization of ESEA.
* Fought to ensure states and districts do not lower expectations or offer unequal access to high-quality learning by supporting a [one percent cap](https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2015/12/10/education-tightens-testing-cap/21667/) on the use of alternative assessments for children with disabilities in the recently passed ESEA reauthorization.
* Consistently opposed efforts to turn federal public school funding into private school vouchers, which denies children with disabilities civil rights protections and drains our public school system of vital resources ([ESEA Floor Vote on Alexander Amendment #2139](https://www.congress.gov/amendment/114th-congress/senate-amendment/2139?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22%5C%22s1177%5C%22%22%5D%7D)).
* Supported the Higher Education and Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008, which had many provisions to help students with disabilities succeed in college including: grants to create or expand transition services for students with disabilities, established an advisory commission to ensure instructional materials are accessible to all students, created the National Technical Assistance Center for Information and Technical Support for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities, created the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program to ensure all children have fully prepared teachers, and created the Teach to Reach grant program which is designed to ensure general education teachers are equipped with the skills necessary to teach children with disabilities. ([L. 110-315](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=110&session=2&vote=00194))

My priorities as President on behalf of children with disabilities include:

* [Fully Fund](https://berniesanders.com/issues/fighting-for-disability-rights/) the federal government’s share of IDEA.
* Dramatically expand early education and care – especially for those who have or are “at risk” for developmental delays.
* Adequately fund the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Education – currently at its lowest funding levels in over 20 years – so it can increase oversight and enforcement of federal civil rights statutes like IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the ADA, and more.
* Require schools to take a stronger role in combatting bullying and harassment ([Safe Schools Improvement Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/311/cosponsors)).
* Push states to include students with disabilities to the fullest extent possible in general education. Ensure federal, state, and local governments provide the supports necessary for children with disabilities to thrive in school.
* Outlaw the harmful use of seclusion and restraint that disproportionately impact children with disabilities.
* End the inequitable access to high-quality educators for students with disabilities by increasing federal investments in special education teachers and support staff.
* Continue to improve transitional services for students with disabilities so they can successfully make the next step in their education or career, and are prepared to live fulfilling, productive lives.
* Require Congress to pass a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that builds on the gains of HEOA and expands federal efforts to ensure that students with disabilities get the support they need to succeed in college.
* End the tax penalty that people who successfully discharge their loans due to total permanent disability face.
* Provide a path to higher education without debt by making public colleges and universities debt and tuition free.

See more: <https://berniesanders.com/issues/its-time-to-make-college-tuition-free-and-debt-free/>

**QUESTION 6: Do you have a plan to reform the benefits system (Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and SSDI) to enable PwDs to work to the best of their capacities?**

**ANSWER 6:**Yes. SSDI is vitally important to more than 11 million Americans, including more than one million veterans and nearly two million children. The average disability benefit is just $1,200 a month, and for many people, that is their entire income. As President, I will protect and expand the Social Security Disability Insurance program.

We are also not going to let the Republicans make massive cuts in Medicare and Medicaid in order to give tax breaks to the richest people in this country. In fact, what we have to do is what every other major country on earth has done, and that is to say loudly and clearly that health care is a right of all people, not a privilege. And that is why I believe we should move towards a Medicare for all single-payer program. As Franklin Delano Roosevelt reminded us many years ago, “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much. It is whether we provide enough for those who have little.”

See more:

* <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/sanders-issues-new-report-documenting-republican-effort-to-cut-social-security>
* <https://berniesanders.com/issues/strengthen-and-expand-social-security/>

**QUESTION 7: Do you have a healthcare plan for PwDs?**

**ANSWER 7:**Yes. Universal health care means everyone is covered, including all PwDs. Regardless of whether you are working or unable to work, no one should struggle to afford premiums, copays, or deductibles. Seniors, people with disabilities, and people with serious or chronic illnesses will be able to afford the medications necessary to keep them healthy without worry of financial ruin. Millions of people will no longer have to choose between health care and other necessities like food, heat and shelter, and will have access to services that may have been out of reach, like dental care or long-term care. It is important to note that this plan builds upon the progress made by the Affordable Care Act and would keep in place all prohibitions on lifetime limits and excluding people with preexisting conditions. Simply put, my plan will provide all Americans with the sense of freedom and peace of mind that comes from knowing you always have access to the health care you need.

See more: <https://berniesanders.com/issues/medicare-for-all/>

**QUESTION 8: According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, fully 32 percent of all inmates in federal prison and 40 percent of prisoners in our jails have disabilities. With 2.2 million people in America’s prisons and jails, many see that system as America’s mental health system. Do you have a plan to address the disability issues of people involved in the criminal justice system so that they will no longer harm others, society or themselves and can participate successfully in community life?**

**ANSWER 8:** For people who have committed crimes that have landed them in jail, there needs to be a path back from prison. The federal system of parole needs to be reinstated. We need real education and real skills training for the incarcerated.

We must end the over-incarceration of nonviolent young Americans who do not pose a serious threat to our society. It is an international embarrassment that we have more people locked up in jail than any other country on earth – more than even the Communist totalitarian state of China. That has got to end.

We must promote policies to give the formerly incarcerated an opportunity for education, including expanding the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program and reentry programs.

You are correct that many inmates are in prison because of failures in our mental health system. That is why I am a cosponsor of the Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act, to provide law enforcement officers with the tools and training they need to identify and respond to mental health issues in the community. Furthermore, it would increase the focus on corrections-based programs, authorize investments in veterans’ treatment courts, and increase screening practices that identify inmates with mental health conditions.

It is unacceptable that of the 44 million adults with a mental illness, fewer than half received mental health services in the past year. We must make mental health services more affordable and accessible. That is why I have always been a supporter of mental health parity; people who suffer from mental illness should have the same rights as those who suffer from physical illness.

See more:

* <https://berniesanders.com/issues/racial-justice/>
* <https://berniesanders.com/mass-incarceration-in-america/>

**QUESTION 9: PwDs are twice as likely to be victims of crime as those without disabilities. PwDs are also far more likely to suffer from police violence as their actions can be misunderstood by others. Do you have a plan to address these issues?**

**ANSWER 9:**Yes. If elected President, I would fight to expand federal funding for youth crime prevention programs, as well as other rehabilitation and work transition programs. I would also fight for increased funding for protection services programs that protect the most vulnerable in our society, including PwDs and the elderly.

With regards to police violence, it is an outrage that in these early years of the 21st Century we are seeing intolerable acts of violence being perpetrated by police. In some instances, law enforcement officers have become disconnected from the communities they are sworn to protect. Violence and brutality of any kind, particularly at the hands of the police meant to protect and serve our communities, is unacceptable and must not be tolerated.

* We must demilitarize our police forces so they don’t look and act like invading armies.
* We must invest in community policing. Only when we get officers into the communities, working within neighborhoods before trouble arises, do we develop the relationships necessary to make our communities safer together. Among other things, that means increasing civilian oversight of police departments.
* We must create a police culture that allows for good officers to report the actions of bad officers without fear of retaliation and allows for a department to follow through on such reports.
* We need police forces that reflect the diversity of our communities, including in the training academies and leadership.
* At the federal level, we need to establish a new model police training program that reorients the way we do law enforcement in this country. With input from a broad segment of the community including activists and leaders from civil rights organizations we will reinvent how we police America.
* We need to federally fund and require body cameras for law enforcement officers to make it easier to hold them accountable.
* We need to require police departments and states to collect data on all police shootings and deaths that take place while in police custody and make that data public.
* Police officers need to be trained to de-escalate confrontations and to humanely interact with people who have mental illnesses.
* We need to make sure federal resources are there to crack down on the illegal activities of hate groups.

See more: <https://berniesanders.com/issues/racial-justice/>

**QUESTION 10: Do you support legalizing medical cannabis, which is key for people with Epilepsy and others?**

**ANSWER 10:** Yes. It is an obscenity that we stigmatize so many young Americans with a criminal record for smoking marijuana, but at the same time, not one major Wall Street executive has been prosecuted for causing the near collapse of our entire economy.

It is time to take marijuana off the federal list of controlled substances and let states decide whether they want to go forward with legalization, regulation and taxation without interference from the federal government.

I introduced a bill that would do just that. My bill would make it the states’ decision whether or not to legalize marijuana for medical or recreational use.

See more: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-114s2237is/pdf/BILLS-114s2237is.pdf>

**QUESTION 11: Is your campaign open to PwDs?**(For example, are your website and documents accessible for people who are blind and use screen readers? Do your videos have captions for the 37.5 million American adults who are deaf or hard of hearing? Are your events ADA accessible, including parking, entrances and bathrooms? Do you have ASL interpreters, captioning, CART services and materials in alternative formats to print at your events? Do you have a dedicated person on staff to address these issues?)

**ANSWER 11:** Yes, the campaign is open to PwDs. Yes, events are ADA accessible. I have an ASL interpreter at all events with more than 250 people, which is most of our events. Yes, I have staff dedicated at all campaign events to address any access issues.

**QUESTION 12: Do you have a plan for veterans with disabilities?**

**ANSWER 12:** Yes. As a long time member and former Chair of the Veterans Affairs Committee in the Senate, I have worked closely with the veterans’ community to improve benefits and services for our nation’s disabled veterans.

During my time as Chairman, I partnered with Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Blinded Veterans of America, and others to protect disabled veterans’ access to services specifically designed to meet their unique needs. This includes landmark legislation to improve VA’s delivery of care and support and shrinking the backlog of claims for disability and pension benefits.

The bill we passed also expanded caregiving services for veterans so caregivers of post-9/11 veterans can get a number of benefits and services through the VA, including education and training, respite care, and financial support, including transportation reimbursement and a stipend. I introduced legislation and continue to fight for expanding caregiver support to veterans of all generations.

These services are critical for our veterans, invaluable for their caregivers, and make good economic sense for taxpayers – because services provided at home are tend to not only be better, they’re more cost-effective than institutional care.  The VA spends more than $100,000 per year for long-term care services in a facility, while it can cost less than $50,000 to provide caregiving services at home, including the cost of the caregiver stipend.

See more:

* <https://berniesanders.com/issues/caring-for-our-veterans/>
* <http://www.sanders.senate.gov/download/s-1950?inline=file>

**QUESTION 13: Do you have a plan for affordable housing and to reduce homelessness for PwDs?**

**ANSWER 13:**Yes. It is no secret that there is a housing crisis all over America in terms of affordable housing. It is especially true for people with disabilities. According to the most recent American Housing Survey, more than 7 million renter households have at least one member with a disability. The Survey also finds that 65 percent of renters aged 80 and over have at least one disability. In fact, in my home state of Vermont, some 45 percent of homeless Vermonters have disabilities.

Clearly, we need to build more affordable housing. We have to restore cuts to existing affordable housing programs like HOME and Section 811 Housing for the Disabled, and make sure that the Section 8 rental voucher program is fully funded. But we must also make a sustained new investment in affordable housing.

I first introduced the National Housing Trust Fund in 2001 while serving in the House. The first new affordable housing program in a generation, the Trust Fund finally became law 2008, and this year states will receive funding through the Fund for the first time.  We must make sure the Trust Fund succeeds, and expand its funding in the coming years.

We must also explore new models of housing people with disabilities. I have strongly supported an integrated health and housing initiative in my home state of Vermont called Support And Services at Home (SASH). SASH successfully offers personalized and coordinated care that helps seniors and people with disabilities get the support they need to stay healthy while living comfortably at home. I am proud to have helped secure a $4.8 million HUD grant to expand SASH at residential communities in Vermont.

In 2013, I secured $350,000 in USDA Rural Development Grants to fund housing improvements in rural areas. The Vermont Council for Independent Living, one of Vermont’s main disability and accessibility advocate organizations, received $100,000 of that funding.

We must also make sure seniors and PwDs have the money to pay for housing. In light of the Social Security Administration’s October 2015 announcement that more than 70 million elderly and disabled Americans will go without a cost-of-living adjustment this year, I joined Senator Elizabeth Warren in sponsoring the SAVE Benefits Act to give Social Security beneficiaries a one-time, 3.9% benefit increase. This extra payment could cover nearly three months of groceries for the average Social Security recipient, or a year’s worth of out-of-pocket costs on critical prescription drugs for the average Medicare beneficiary. The payments would be paid for by closing off a tax loophole which allows corporations to deduct unlimited amounts of corporate executive compensation from the federal taxes owed.

**QUESTION 14: Do you have a plan to address the lack of transportation options for PwDs, including in places like rural Iowa?**

**ANSWER 14:** Yes. As a representative of the very rural state of Vermont, I am deeply familiar with the barriers facing those who need transportation assistance in rural areas. I have been an outspoken supporter of improving transportation in rural and underserved areas, and have fought for better public transportation around the state and country, but also for special ride services for PwDs and their caregivers. In 2012, I helped secure grant funding from the Federal Transit Administration to improve a transit hub in southern Vermont, providing residents additional and affordable transportation options.

http://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/leahy-sanders-welch-announce-3-million-for-deerfield-valley-transit-association

I have also long advocated for the strengthening the ADA which has played a historic role in allowing more than 55,000,000 individuals in the United States who have disabilities to better participate in society by removing barriers to employment, transportation, public services, telecommunications, and public accommodations.

**QUESTION 15: Do you have a plan to advance innovations (i.e., assistive technologies, devices) that can help PwDs become more independent and successful?**

Yes. Simply providing services is not enough to assist PwDs. We need to actively fund research and innovation that helps those with disabilities live independent lives. To that end, I sponsored the Improved Compensation for Hearing Loss Act of 2013. While focused on veterans, this legislation provides a valuable framework for prevention, early detection and treatment of disabilities.

**QUESTION 16: In your foreign policy/national security plan, do you plan to continue America’s tradition of standing up for the rights of oppressed people, including PwDs, around the world?**

As mentioned above, as President I will fight for the U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It is imperative that we continue to fight for equal access and equal rights for people with disabilities. That’s why I strongly support the ratification of this important treaty.

I will protect America, and be relentless in combating terrorists who would do us harm. My administration will also embrace our commitments to defend freedom and support human rights of the oppressed, including persons with disabilities.

I believe that foreign policy is not just deciding how to react to conflict around the world, but also includes redefining America’s role in the increasingly global economy. For example, the international trade agreements we enter into not only have enormous consequences for Americans here at home, but greatly affect our relations with countries around the world.  Every trade agreement we enter into must respect workers’ rights in other countries – including the rights and treatment of workers with disabilities.

See more:

* <https://berniesanders.com/issues/war-and-peace/>
* <http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=112&session=2&vote=00219>