**1. What policies and actions do you support to reduce the stigmas of people with disabilities that are barriers to employment, independence and equality?**

As President, I will strive to build a culture of belonging for everyone. We need both a massive shift in federal policies and a more inclusive and welcoming society to break down barriers to employment, dignity, independence, and inequality for people with disabilities. I will retrofit our government so it works for, and not against, people with disabilities. I will use the office of the presidency—and all the levers of government available to me—to tirelessly advocate for people with disabilities, so they no longer have to do it on their own.

People with disabilities should have every opportunity to live the life of their choosing, and that includes having a fulfilling, well-paying job and career options to achieve community integration. Yet today, only three in ten Americans with disabilities are employed, compared to about seven in ten people without disabilities. For Black Americans with disabilities, the employment rate is less than two in ten.

That’s why I am committed to dramatically increasing opportunities for competitive integrated employment. Embracing Senator Tom Harkin’s goal, my administration will work on a national campaign to double labor force participation for people with disabilities by 2030, the 40th anniversary of the ADA, with a focus on closing racial inequities. This will require support from different federal agencies, states, and stakeholders across the private and social sectors. Together, I believe we can dramatically reduce the stigmas of people with disabilities by committing to bold goals, shifting federal policies, and creating a culture of belonging for everyone.

**2. What is your record on improving the lives of people with disabilities? What have you done to enable people with disabilities to have competitive jobs, meaningful careers or become entrepreneurs?**

As Mayor of South Bend, inclusion was at the center of our efforts. My administration worked with the local city council to pass a human rights ordinance in my first year in office, and our human rights commission was expanded to encompass the entire county. In early 2016, I signed an executive order establishing a city-wide diversity and inclusion initiative, which became my administration’s Office of Diversity & Inclusion later that year. The work also included infrastructure improvements such as reshaping our major downtown streets from four-lane highways to extended sidewalk bump-outs.

**3. What specific workforce development strategies do you support that will empower youth with disabilities?**

My administration will create a national network of apprenticeships and an Internships for All program that provide greater opportunities for competitive integrated employment for youth across the country. We will invest $5 billion over the next decade in a national apprenticeship program that ensures access to a well-paying job—especially for youth with disabilities—within 30 miles of their home. The Office of Disability Employment Policy within the Department of Labor (DOL) will work with employers and disability organizations to make sure apprenticeships are accessible and provide supports and opportunities for growth. The DOL will specifically expand funding for apprenticeships programs to grow the direct care workforce, including job coaches, benefits counselors, and health service providers.

I will also incentivize companies to offer paid internships to students from underrepresented backgrounds, including students with disabilities. Companies participating in the program will be able to tax deduct half the costs of the interns.

**4. The jobs of the future will largely require post-secondary education or other credentials. Today 65 percent of students with disabilities complete high school. What policies do you advocate to support the academic and career success of students with disabilities, especially for students from historically marginalized communities and backgrounds?**

To enable students with disabilities to thrive, it is critical that they can learn in a safe and supportive environment. This includes investing in policies and initiatives to reduce bullying and end corporal punishment, restraint, and seclusion. While schools are prohibited from suspending students for behavior caused by their disability, students with disabilities are suspended at disproportionately high rates, especially disabled students of color. I will support the [Ending Corporal Punishment in School Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/727/text)and encourage states to pass legislation that eliminates suspensions for discretionary infractions such as “disrespect” infractions, where bias is most likely to seep in. I will direct the Department of Education to issue guidance on alternatives to punitive disciplinary practices—which contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline—like restorative justice and the use of positive behavioral intervention supports.

I will also expand resources for student mental health as well as trauma-informed care and healing-centered engagement in schools, so schools approach trauma from a holistic perspective by looking at both a student’s experience in and outside of school. My administration will support collaboration among families, teachers, school counselors, social workers, and other education and community-based providers to ensure students receive appropriate and quality care to support their healing and agency, which will directly support their academic and career success.

My proposal also calls for making inclusive education a national expectation, so that 85% of students with intellectual and multiple disabilities are in general education classrooms for 80% or more of the day by the end of the 2025 school year. Too many students with disabilities, especially disabled students of color, are still segregated from general education classrooms at unacceptable rates. We must create an expectation of inclusion so classrooms represent our society’s diversity. That’s why I will strengthen data collection to promote accountability; invest in the supplementary aids, services, and supports to promote inclusion; and bolster teacher education and training to promote inclusive schools.

Finally, we must ensure that services for students with disabilities don’t end in high school–especially services supporting students from historically underserved communities. Programs that fund special education services in K-12 schools are not always well-aligned with programs that support a student’s transition to higher education and workforce education, and many families aren’t aware of the opportunities available to them. My administration will better coordinate students’ programs and services, ensuring federal agencies like the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services and the Social Security Administration match eligibility requirements, timelines, and strategies. I will also task an interagency working group with publishing best practices for higher education institutions serving disabled students.

**5. Immigration is a major social, political and workforce development issue. Given questions around the new “public charge” rule that impacts immigrants with disabilities, the challenges faced by English language learners with non-visible disabilities who want to develop their skills and the talent needs of the business community, what is your vision for enabling immigrants to succeed here in America?**

First and foremost, I will reverse the prejudicial and unlawful public charge rule, which disproportionately impacts disabled immigrants and their families by punishing them for receiving the medical benefits they need and to which they are entitled. Second, I will push for minimizing immigration detention, which is costly and unnecessary and has an even more detrimental impact on individuals with disabilities. The ACLU estimates that 15% of people in immigration detention have some sort of disability. As part of my plan to minimize immigration detention, I will expand on successful programs like the Family Case Management Program, which not only helps immigrants navigate the complex immigration legal system, but also helps them integrate in the United States. Finally, I will ensure that USCIS facilities are ADA compliant and that the office of the Ombudsman and Civil Rights and Civil Liberties within the Department of Homeland Security affirmatively prioritize inclusion of all groups, including people with disabilities, so that the benefit of citizenship is open to all who qualify.

**6. People with disabilities are twice as likely to be victims of crime as those without disabilities. This includes the fact that both children and adults with disabilities are more likely to be victims of rape or sexual assault. How would you address these issues?**

The rates of people with disabilities who are victims of rape and sexual assault are absolutely unacceptable, and my administration will take several steps to dramatically reduce crime against people with disabilities.

First, my administration will invest $10 billion over ten years to end workplace sexual harassment and discrimination against women, especially women with disabilities, by increasing accountability and prevention. We will fund oversight and prevention efforts that make it the responsibility of employers—not employees—to maintain safe and equitable work environments.

Second, we will guarantee that every worker—regardless of the size of their company—is protected from workplace sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination. Civil rights protection at work is non-negotiable. I will fight to pass and sign the BE HEARD Act, which will ensure that workers in firms with fewer than 15 people are federally protected from workplace sexual harassment, keeping millions more workers safe. I have endorsed the National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, and will fight to expand worker protections for domestic workers, most of whom are women of color.

Third, we will also improve transparency around sexual harassment by requiring public companies to disclose the aggregate number of workplace sexual harassment incidents reported, investigated and settled annually, and create a digital tool to inform and empower the public and potential employees. And we will require companies in industries with the highest risk of harassment–such as food service, hospitality, and domestic work–to conduct climate assessments based on EEOC data and the EEOC risk factors, and create or update harassment prevention plans every three years.

I will also strengthen Title IX protections and support students with disabilities who face sexual assault in college. Female undergraduates with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to experience sexual assault as female undergraduates without a disability. My administration will reverse the Trump administration’s weakening of Title IX by enacting a comprehensive, student-centric process to amend Title IX regulations as outlined in my[Building Power](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/building-power/) plan. We will require that students in college are made aware, via accessible formats, of the services available to them, and streamline support services for students with disabilities. And I will direct the Department of Education to publish a resource to help colleges understand the rights of students with disabilities to have accommodations as they report sexual assault, go through the disciplinary process, and utilize support services.

In addition, I will work to remove youths from adult courts, jails, and prisons, where there are high rates of sexual victimization. I will fully fund the Juvenile Justice Reform Act to ensure that every state has resources to implement the requirements of the Act, including the provisions to remove youths from adult jails. Pete will also prioritize and incentivize states and localities to fully implement the Prison Rape Elimination Act’s (PREA) Youthful Inmate Standard to completely remove all youth from adult jails and adult prisons.

**7. Today there are more than 750,000 people with disabilities behind bars. Many face serious barriers to reentry when they complete their sentences and return home. What reforms do you support to ensure that returning citizens with disabilities have the resources, skills and mental health support to succeed when they leave incarceration?**

First, my administration is committed to reducing incarceration by 50 percent so fewer people are incarcerated in the first place. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and people with disabilities are highly overrepresented in prisons. I will increase federal grant funding for civil legal aid and invest in diversion programs suited for people with disabilities.

I will also work to protect individuals with disabilities who are incarcerated and often lack necessary treatment and care. My administration will ensure that ADA regulations are properly enforced in jails and prisons and increase oversight in federal facilities to ensure compliance. We will eliminate the Medicaid exception for people who are incarcerated so they have access to quality medical treatment. And we will restore Pell Grant access to people who are incarcerated, as studies show that access to postsecondary education while incarcerated increases the likelihood of finding jobs upon release and decreases recidivism rates.

To support returning individuals with disabilities, we will significantly reduce the use of supervised release on the federal level by limiting it to two years, cutting burdensome requirements and technical constraints, and making it harder to be sent back to prison for small violations of the terms of release.

We will also ensure that people with convictions have the freedom to access education, jobs, housing, and health care. We will support ban the box and other fair chance hiring initiatives, lift barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated people from accessing public benefits, including for housing credits and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and encourage automatic expungement and the elimination of extensive waiting periods. We will encourage individuals with disabilities with criminal convictions to apply for Small Business Administration and Department of Labor loans and designate loans for returning citizens to get their lives back on track after their sentence has been served.

My administration will also provide funding to empower states to provide better opportunities for individuals to prepare for life after incarceration. States are already working on reforms that provide better opportunities for incarcerated individuals, and I will encourage, support, and greatly expand these reforms. For example, programs like South Carolina’s Second Chance Program could be expanded across the country to help people with disabilities who are incarcerated to prepare for employment once they return home.

In addition, we will ensure that returning individuals with disabilities have health care, which includes access to comprehensive coverage for mental health care. As President, I will enforce mental health parity in health care coverage, including in Medicare and Medicaid; dramatically expand the use of medication-assisted treatment (MAT), and promote whole-person care by integrating the behavioral health care system with the physical health care system.

**8. People with disabilities also are far more likely to suffer from police violence, partially because manifestations of disability can be misunderstood. How would you address these issues?**

It is unacceptable that almost half of the people killed by police in the United States have a disability. This is often due to poor training of police officers. I will make sure we train first responders and police to identify and appropriately respond to individuals with disabilities. First responders are often responsible for responding to individuals with a range of disabilities, from deafness to mental health and addiction needs. My administration will integrate mental health clinicians and co-response teams into the first responder workforce and train first responders in de-escalation, therapeutic and care approaches as alternatives to arrest, and hospitalization for people who just need mental health care. As outlined in my[Securing Justice](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/securing-justice/)plan, my administration will also invest in rigorous law enforcement training and require de-escalation and higher standards for use of force for all police interactions.

**9. How would you ensure that people with disabilities have access to healthcare and the benefits they need while enabling them with opportunities to work to the best of their capacities without losing the supports they need to live? This relates to private healthcare as well as SSI, SSDI, Medicare and Medicaid.**

Americans with disabilities face many challenges and barriers when interacting with our health care and Social Security systems. To advance comprehensive, affordable health care for all, my administration will ensure that all people with disabilities have an affordable coverage alternative through [Medicare for All](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/health-care/) [Who Want It](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/health-care/). We will expand access to telehealth to make it easier to receive health care at or near one’s home and dramatically reduce drug prices, as outlined in my [Affordable Medicines for All](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/affordable-medicine/)plan.

To make it easier for people with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, we will eliminate SSDI’s 24-month waiting period for Medicare coverage, saving 10,000 to 20,000 lives per year over the next decade. We will eliminate the “benefit cliff” so benefits gradually phase out until recipients reach nearly $45,000 in annual earnings, eliminate ineffective current work incentives, and reduce excessive wait times for SSDI and SSI appeals cases. In addition, we will enable SSDI participants to start receiving income benefits as soon as they are admitted to the program, and update critical SSI thresholds to allow people to receive greater assistance as costs of living rise.

I am also committed to ensuring that people with disabilities can receive long-term care in their home and community by supporting the Disability Integration Act. My administration will enhance the Medicaid program to ensure people with disabilities on Medicaid have access to care in their homes and communities, including by ending waitlists for waiver programs.

**10. What are your thoughts on ensuring that people with disabilities have the option to live** **in their homes instead of institutions and still have the community attendant supports they need to live? Do you have a plan for affordable housing and to reduce homelessness for people with disabilities?**

All people with disabilities should be able to live full and meaningful lives at every stage of life. Ensuring that individuals can learn, live, work, shop, and socialize in their own communities requires access to affordable, quality, home- and community-based long-term services and supports. That’s why I will ensure that people with disabilities have the option of receiving long-term services and supports in their home and community, including by supporting the[Disability Integration Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/117/text).

My administration will enhance the Medicaid program to ensure people with disabilities on Medicaid have access to care in their homes and communities, including by ending waitlists for waiver programs. We will do this by increasing Medicaid eligibility, eliminating Medicaid’s bias towards institutional care, ending Medicaid waiting lists, and permanently funding the Money Follows the Person program, which eliminates barriers that restrict using Medicaid funds for community-based care.

I firmly believe that all people with disabilities deserve access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing, and my proposal[“A New Era of Inclusion for People with Disabilities”](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/access/)shares my plan for affordable housing and to reduce homelessness for people with disabilities. As President, I will ensure that public housing, housing voucher programs, and homelessness assistance grants promote access to housing for individuals with disabilities, and invest in navigation resources and additional funding to promote accessibility in private market housing.

To achieve this, I will reinstate the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule and appoint a Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) who will promote accessible, affordable housing for people with disabilities. I will also strengthen the HUD Office of Civil Rights to better protect people with disabilities from housing discrimination.

To combat the epidemic of homelessness among individuals with disabilities, I will invest in mental health care and supportive services that reduce the number of individuals with mental illnesses who experience homelessness. I will also make health care affordable for all, earmark a portion of McKinney-Vento homelessness assistance grants for modifications that increase accessibility in shelters and temporary housing, and ensure that permanent supportive housing developments accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities.

My administration will also build a national database of accessible and affordable housing to enable individuals with disabilities to easily find housing that meets their needs. We will dramatically increase accessible public housing by prioritizing accessibility in new construction and rehabilitation, and expand public funding for accessibility improvements to public and private housing. Minor home modifications enable people with disabilities and aging Americans to remain in their homes, saving families money, reducing costs to public insurance, and promoting independence and community.

**11. The federal law and benefits system punish people who want to work or whose families want to help them. For example, currently people with disabilities who are on SSI are prohibited of having more than $2,000 liquid assets at any one time. Furthermore, current law limits parents and grandparents to helping their children financially who acquired their disability prior to age 26 but not if they acquire a disability after age 26. What will you do to ensure that people have more options than being forced to choose between access to supports, benefits and service or the opportunity to pursue work, careers and an income?**

I will protect Supplemental Security Income unlike President Trump, who has proposed large cuts–with the most pernicious and harmful of these cuts being targeted towards poor children with disabilities. My administration will update critical SSI thresholds. The $65 threshold was set in 1974 and is not indexed to inflation or earnings growth. It is time to make sure it rises in line with median wage growth every year. I will also index the unearned income disregard threshold and the asset threshold to inflation, allowing people to receive greater assistance as their costs of living rise. I will also eliminate the “benefit cliff” for SSDI, so benefits gradually phase out until recipients reach nearly $45,000 in annual earnings, and eliminate SSDI’s ineffective current work incentives. To encourage work among SSDI recipients who worry about not being able to reenroll, my administration will give all former SSDI beneficiaries who lose their jobs access to the expedited reinstatement process. More information on my reforms to Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are outlined [here](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/access/#SocialSecurity).

**12. How would you advance innovations (i.e., assistive technologies, devices) that can help people with disabilities become more successfully employed, productive and independent?**

Innovative technologies can be a great asset to people with disabilities, but they must be accessible, usable, affordable, and understandable. Inclusive technology can make classrooms and workplaces more accessible while also saving costs for employers. As President, I will affirm America’s leadership in innovation to help people with disabilities become more independent, productive, and successfully employed.

My administration will develop an Accessible Technology Bill of Rights that will be a gold standard for government and private uses of smart technologies. It will emphasize that access must be built in at the beginning of development processes. The committee will include disability experts and advocates that promote universal design and together develop best practices for industry.

We will also prioritize the goal of full digital inclusion across all federal agencies to ensure that Americans with disabilities can access all the benefits of technology. We’ll accelerate the adoption of accessibility standards across the federal government and invest in user experience (UX) research so digital products and services are designed with and tested by users with disabilities. And we’ll task the Justice Department to finish issuing regulations on website accessibility under the ADA, which the Trump administration has withdrawn.

In addition, I will ensure full high-speed, affordable broadband coverage for everyone through an $80 billion Internet For All initiative and make net neutrality the law of the land. People with disabilities are 20 percentage points less likely to have broadband at home and three times more likely than people without a disability to say they never go online. A lack of broadband often means missing out on assistive tools that support independent living. As outlined in my[plan for rural opportunity](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/unleash-rural-opportunity/), my administration will ensure all unserved communities have affordable, high-speed broadband coverage.

**13. What are your plans to ensure that the bureaucracy of the Veterans Administration supports and serves veterans with disabilities? What is your plan to support veterans with disabilities, especially female veterans with disabilities?**

Many of our veterans return home with wounds—visible and invisible—only to experience challenges in accessing the benefits that were promised to them for their service. To change this, my [plan for veterans](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/veterans/) shares how my approach to providing veteran services will be laser-focused on the needs of veterans and their families, especially those with disabilities.

First, I will ensure that all veterans and their family members have access to affordable health care through[Medicare for All Who Want It](https://peteforamerica.com/policies/health-care/). It is unacceptable that over half a million veterans lack any health insurance, and most veterans cannot utilize the VA because they lack a service-connected disability or do not meet the financial threshold. My public plan would provide veterans and family members who are not enrolled in VA care, don’t have private insurance, or are dissatisfied with their insurance with a high-quality, affordable public alternative.

Second, my administration will streamline access to medical care, which will particularly support veterans with disabilities. For too long, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA have operated in silos, rather than cooperating to better serve American veterans. We will focus on improving how veterans access mental health care, far upstream of a crisis, by developing a VA mental health care concierge service, and increase investments in veteran suicide prevention. And we will improve the quality of aging-in-place options for veterans and expand respite services for caregivers.

My administration will also support the transition from active duty service, including by supporting veteran small business owners. I will increase federal subcontracting with disability-owned businesses, including by enforcing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act. And I will launch the Walker-Lewis Promise that will aim to award 25 percent of federal contracting dollars to underrepresented small business owners, including firms owned by veterans, women, and people with disabilities. We will transform the Small Business Administration’s Boots to Business entrepreneurship education program from two days to two weeks, and support community organizations that help veterans reintegrate back into society.

**14. People with disabilities are at extreme risk from climate change. What are your plans to reduce the climate crisis and to create emergency solutions for people with disabilities when disasters strike?**

People with all kinds of disabilities and seniors aging into disability are disproportionately affected by climate disruption and natural disasters. My administration will ensure that, before disaster strikes, we are prepared to ensure that people with disabilities will be safe and have their rights respected.

We will help ensure that people with disabilities participate in disaster preparedness efforts and, after a disaster, can return to their homes and communities. During disasters, people with disabilities often lose access to support services, assistive technology such as wheelchairs, and accessible housing. My administration will direct federal funding to local organizations, including neighborhood emergency disaster response teams, and independent living centers, to ensure people with disabilities participate in readiness and recovery efforts. We will prioritize health care continuity and protection from unwanted institutionalization, as well as reinstate regional disability access and functional needs coordinators to assist in disaster response and planning activities.

We’ll also include representation from communities, including the disability and senior communities, in Regional Resilience Hubs and other disaster preparedness planning forums. As shared in my disaster preparedness plan, [Resilient Communities](https://medium.com/the-moment-by-pete-for-america/resilient-communities-a-new-disaster-preparedness-approach-89fd78a689e2), my administration’s Regional Resilience Hubs will have a Board of Advisors that includes elected officials, community leaders, and citizens.

It’s also important to increase the use of universal design principles in disaster preparedness planning and reduce barriers to accessibility. All mass shelter sites must be accessible to people with disabilities. Disaster relief applications should be streamlined and offered in formats that can be used by people who are blind, deaf, hard of hearing, or have other disabilities.

**15. Are your office, website and events accessible to people with disabilities? Have you identified a process for including people with disabilities in your staff and policy advisors? If yes, please describe.**

My campaign has committed to ensuring our offices, website, and events are accessible to people with disabilities. We have worked with an accessibility consultant who provided us with resources and best practices for ensuring that our recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and workplace is as inclusive and accessible as possible. Many people with disabilities are on our staff, and some of their stories are shared in videos on this website: <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/access/>.

We have published a Web Accessibility Statement, which is linked to from the bottom of our home page (h[ttps://peteforamerica.com/web-accessibility/](https://peteforamerica.com/web-accessibility/)), which reiterates how important accessibility is to us. We have worked with outside consultants to conduct a review on our accessibility practices online and offline at events, and have been implementing many of their suggestions. We also created [accessibility@peteforamerica.com](mailto:accessibility@peteforamerica.com)as a way for people to get in touch with us so we can hear feedback and continuously improve.