Healthy, inclusive communities are ones that make the healthiest choices the easiest and most accessible ones by removing barriers and providing needed assistance and resources to all community members at all levels. A failure to actively ensure that optimal, individual-level health is achievable for all can cause a community to experience an absence of health equity. This absence can lead to and exacerbate health disparities in individuals and groups with shared traits and characteristics, including:

- education level
- socioeconomic status
- gender
- race
- sexual orientation
- ability level
- age
- religious beliefs

Individuals with disability are at a greater risk of experiencing health disparities than any other demographic group in the country. Males and females with functional limitations across the lifespan self-report worse overall, mental, and physical health than those without functional limitations:

While this inequity is astonishing in and of itself, it is doubly alarming considering that disability prevalence is likely to increase across the lifespan due to:

- Growing aging population
- Increasing survival rate of high-risk infants
- Increasing prevalence of disabling conditions and behaviors in childhood (overweight/obese, autism, asthma, sedentary behavior, etc.)
- Overweight/obese levels and trends in young- and middle-aged adults
Within the broad categories of physical and mental health and health behaviors, adults with disability experience greater health disparities than adults without disabilities, including:

- **Physical:** natural and architectural environments
- **Programmatic:** resource allotment, investment, and availability; policies, procedures, and protocols; lack of training and professional competence; etc.
- **Attitudinal:** personal beliefs, opinions, knowledge, and prejudices of individuals with disability, their families and friends, program and event staff, planners, and participants, and community leaders, workers, and peers

Health inequity and disparities are not caused by an individual’s disability condition, but rather by a lack of access to healthy opportunities. This lack of access can occur on multiple societal levels, including:

- **Physical:** natural and architectural environments
- **Programmatic:** resource allotment, investment, and availability; policies, procedures, and protocols; lack of training and professional competence; etc.
- **Attitudinal:** personal beliefs, opinions, knowledge, and prejudices of individuals with disability, their families and friends, program and event staff, planners, and participants, and community leaders, workers, and peers

References