
Call to Action: The Need for Fitness for People of All Abilities



People of all abilities should have the opportunity to exercise effectively and to participate in fitness activities. For individuals with impairments or disabilities, fitness opportunities are currently limited because of the accommodations that are necessary to be able to use certain equipment. All individuals have a need and a desire to stay healthy and fit. Individuals will generally choose to go to public fitness facilities, including health clubs and other privately owned membership gyms, to exercise. Therefore, these facilities must be equipped with effective access routes,

equipment, and programs for people with impairments or disabilities.

There is a growing social and political movement to provide equal opportunities for people with disabilities in fitness facilities. Policies, guidelines, and standards have been created to address the needs of people with disabilities. Numerous materials have been created addressing access issues.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) ensures that equal opportunities are provided to people with disabilities. Fitness facilities and gyms must provide a percentage of accessible parking spaces and restrooms, and the built environment must comply with accessibility criteria, e.g., parking, doors, corridors, stairways, elevators, ramps, restrooms, etc. Little has been done until now, however, to ensure that the fitness equipment and programs within the building are usable by those with impairments or disabilities.

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Centers for Interactive Exercise and Recreation Technologies and Exercise Physiology Benefiting People with Disabilities (RERC RecTech) has been working to break down barriers to access of the total fitness experience. RecTech has been working closely with the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) over the last decade to bring forth a harmonized, international set of criteria for aerobic and strength equipment. These standards have been published by the ASTM F08.30 Fitness Products Committee. ASTM is a voluntary consensus standards organization that houses over 12,000 standards. The two published standards that apply to all equipment are Standard Specification (F3021) and Test Method (F3022) for Universal Design (UD) of Fitness Equipment for Inclusive Use by Persons with Functional Limitations and Impairments. The four published equipment-specific standards that contain additional UD criteria are the Standard Specification (F2810) and Test Methods (F2811) for Elliptical Trainers and the Standard Specification (F2216) and Test Methods (F2277) for Selectorized Strength Equipment.

In 2010 President Obama announced that ADA Title III would be amended to cover the use of exercise equipment in health clubs, hotel fitness centers, public recreation centers, and schools. Per the Department of Justice's (DOJ) 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, (effective for new construction and alterations after March of 2012), accessible routes are required to connect one of each type of fitness equipment with other elements and spaces of the facility required to be accessible. Barriers to accessing the full fitness experience in facilities open to the public are being removed, but there is still work to do. Policies and practices need to address not only the built environment, access routes, and equipment, but also programming, staff, and trainers in order to build a truly inclusive environment.

The RESNA Standards Committee on Inclusive Fitness (RESNA IF) was founded in 2012 and has been created to help fitness facility operators, trainers, and staff members increase the accessibility of their facilities for people of all abilities. RESNA IF is currently drafting volume 1 of a National Standard for Inclusive Fitness. Section 1 provides guidelines for understanding the framework/model of a truly inclusive environment for fitness. Section 2 identifies materials that are currently available to address the accessibility of the fitness environment, including guidelines, standards, and literature covering policy, facilities, equipment, facility layout, staff/trainers, users/consumers, programming, and marketing. Section 3 addresses specifications and test methods for best practices in inclusive fitness beyond current minimum requirements. This last section has been developed as additional accessibility barriers are identified, envisioning public fitness centers for people of all abilities.



RESNA IF's current goal is to inform the individuals who need to know about current opportunities and upcoming changes and initiatives. We are seeking to foster connections with individuals such as users, staff, trainers, and fitness facility owners. There are already a number of helpful resources available to facilities and trainers desiring to provide an inclusive fitness environment. Manufacturers are also moving forward in continuing to create new inclusive fitness equipment.

RESNA IF would like to spread the word about the committee! Additionally, RESNA IF is open to all and is currently comprised of users, fitness facility staff/trainers, manufacturers, clinicians, experts, product testers, and individuals in research and development. If you would like more information on how you can participate on the committee or information on any of the above activities or resources, please contact the RESNA IF Chair, Seanna Kringen, at seanna@beneficialdesigns.com.