



How to Embed a Disability Economic Justice Policy Framework in Domestic Policy Making

JANUARY 12, 2023 – KIMBERLY KNACKSTEDT AND REBECCA VALLES

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What is disability policy?¹ Health care, benefits, education, housing, long-term supports, the Americans with Disabilities Act, inclusion: these are all key terms that come to mind. Some argue disability is not a distinct policy area, but rather people and a community to engage with about policies. At the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative, we believe that both are true: disability policy is a distinct policy sector and also crosses all other policies impacting our daily lives.

With 61 million people, or 1 in 4, in the United States living with disabilities, every policy is a disability policy. Yet, disability policy is too often siloed, treated as separate and set apart from broader economic and social policymaking; likewise, the disability community is treated as an afterthought, a box to check at the end of the policy process rather than center from the beginning. When done right, disability policy embeds access, equity, and inclusion, benefiting impacted groups far beyond the impacted community's core membership.

Values-Based Policy

Too often today, public policies are reactive in nature and developed in silos outside of the larger economic context

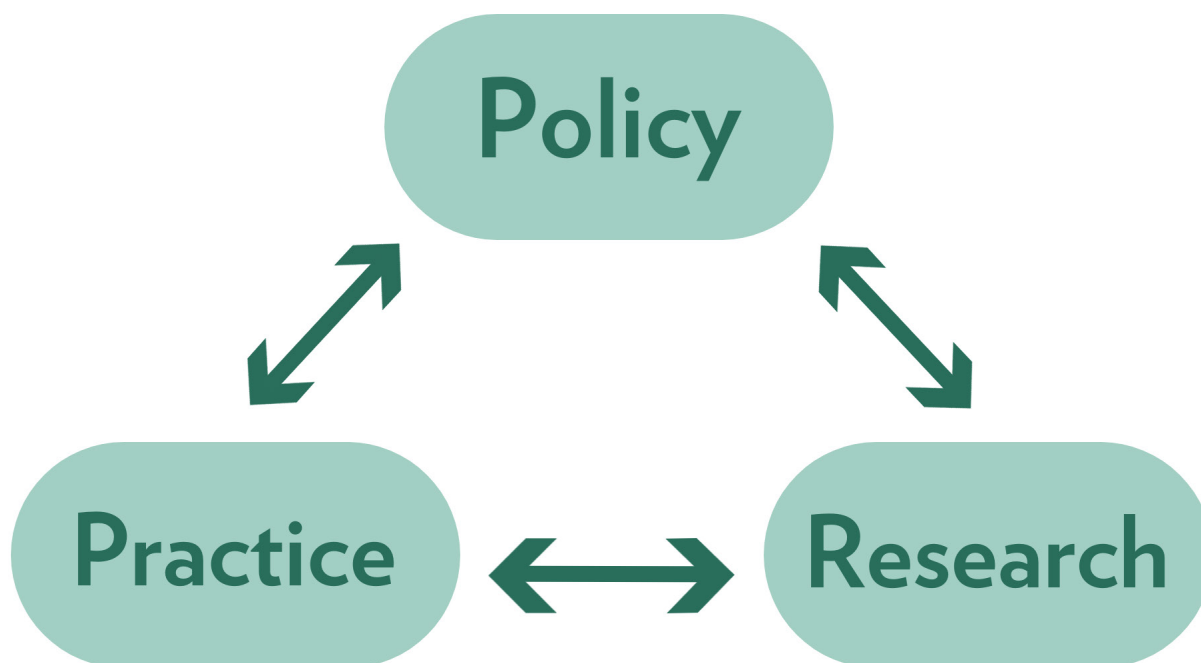
that individuals and families experience on the ground. But real life does not happen in silos—and in the words of Audre Lorde, “people do not lead single-issue lives.”

The Disability Economic Justice Collaborative is taking a different approach. We believe that public policies should be anchored in a clear and grounded set of values about the kind of society we want to build—one that respects and centers human dignity and the inherent rights that come with being human. Rather than tinkering at the edges, we believe the time is now for a high-level, values-based disability economic justice framework to inform and guide the development and implementation of policy making with a disability lens—across issue areas and traditional silos, in recognition that every issue is a disability issue—to realize the vision of economic security for all disabled people in the United States.

The Collaborative's framework, which we present below, is intended to be used by all and shared widely as a guide for policy development. Its applicability includes federal policy making in Congress, the White House, and across federal agencies; at the state and local levels; as well as at policy and advocacy organizations that shape policy

This report can be found online at:

<https://tcf.org/content/commentary/how-to-embed-a-disability-economic-justice-policy-framework-in-domestic-policy-making/>



making. Whether you are an advocate, policymaker, funder, practitioner, or researcher, the goal is to find yourself within the framework and use the values it articulates to bring a disability policy lens to your work. Implicit in and core to the successful integration of this framework is the principle that each of the elements of disability economic justice must not only be available but also meaningfully accessible to all disabled people in the United States. For example, access to adequate, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food is of little benefit to someone without the services and support they require in order to purchase and prepare it.

The ultimate goal of this policy framework and the work of the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative is achieving long-denied economic security for disabled people in the United States—and creating clear policy goals and outcomes to measure our progress towards that vision—through a connection between policy, research, and practice.

Disability Economic Justice

Disability Economic Justice, as defined by the Disability Economic Justice Collaborative, means creating opportunities for every disabled person to have a dignified,

productive, and creative life, and centering the perspectives and experiences of disabled people—and especially multiply marginalized disabled people—to create a society in which all disabled people have access to equitable opportunities and achieve economic security. Disability economic justice encompasses nearly all domestic policy, from health care to education, from employment to accessible technology. Voting access and civil rights are also crucial, because equal opportunities and full participation cannot be achieved without bringing a disability lens across all policy making.

Disability Economic Justice Policy Framework

The Disability Economic Justice Policy Framework is intended to be used by all and shared widely as a guide for policy development. Its applicability includes federal policy making in Congress, the White House, and across federal agencies; at the state and local levels; as well as at policy and advocacy organizations that shape policy making. Whether you are an advocate, policymaker, funder, practitioner, or researcher, the goal is to find yourself within the framework and use the values it articulates to bring a disability policy lens to your work.

Every Disabled Person:

- ✓ can live **free from disability-based discrimination**, as well as discrimination based on multiply marginalized and intersecting identities such as race, gender (including sexual orientation and gender identity), immigration status, and religion;
- ✓ has accessible, affordable, stable, safe, and quality **housing**;
- ✓ has access to reliable, affordable, and accessible **transportation**;
- ✓ can **live independently**, with dignity, access to support in the community, and access to culturally and linguistically appropriate care and services at their direction;
- ✓ has access to the **health care** they need, when they need it, and from the providers they want to be served by, including primary and specialist health care, sexual and reproductive health care, dental care, mental health care, medication, telehealth, and emergency care;



has access to adequate, nutritious, and culturally appropriate **food**;



is provided a high-quality, equitable **education** in an inclusive educational setting, from early childhood to post-secondary education, including an affordable higher education;



can find and retain equitable **employment** at competitive wages, in integrated settings, and with appropriate accommodations and paid leave, including access to self-employment and entrepreneurship opportunities;



has direct, equitable pathways to attain economic security and mobility through **building wealth and savings**;



has access to an **equitable public benefits system** that provides a robust social safety net adequate to ensure a basic, dignified standard of living and free from intrusive barriers to work, savings, and marriage;



is provided fair and equitable access to and treatment by the **American legal system**, including through civil, criminal, immigration, and family courts; court fines and fees; and the right to support for legal decision-making and the right to counsel as a reasonable accommodation;



can engage in **civic participation** by voting and engaging in the democratic process with appropriate accommodations provided equitably and fairly;



is centered in **emergency and disaster planning**, as well as climate change sustainability and other infrastructure discussions, to ensure accessible and inclusive solutions for the future of the United States; and



has access to and can fully engage with **affordable technologies** at home, in the community, and at work, including broadband and assistive technologies that keep pace with the rapidly changing technology of the times, while ensuring freedom from surveillance when engaging with such technology.

Authors

Kimberly Knackstedt is a senior fellow and co-director of The Century Foundation's Disability Economic Justice Collaborative, where her work focuses on economic justice for people with disabilities and their families. She previously has served in disability policy positions in Congress and the White House. She brings experience as a classroom teacher of students with disabilities and as a person with chronic illness to her policy perspectives.

Rebecca Vallas is a senior fellow and co-director of The Century Foundation's Disability Economic Justice Collaborative, where she leads TCF's work to achieve economic justice for people with disabilities and their families.

Acknowledgements

This commentary and framework was developed in coordination with the [Disability Economic Justice Collaborative](#).

Notes

¹ Note: In this article, disability is discussed from a policy perspective. The Disability Economic Justice Collaborative also believes in disability as an identity, which is integral to development of policy. Disability is inherently part of the human experience and intersects with race, gender, socioeconomic status, and all aspects of an individual's being. To learn more about disability identity, watch this [video](#) or read this [article](#).