



Understanding and Addressing Inequities in Human Services

Kimberly R. Mills, Ph.D., BCBA-D

Executive Director: Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in
Developmental Disabilities

The United States Territories

Who Are We?

- Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, The U.S. Virgin Islands, North Mariana Islands
- The term territory is a term that is applied to regions and land masses that are acquired by a larger foreign entity and added to the possessions and holdings of that larger entity. While some territories eventually became states such as Alaska and Hawaii, some remained U.S. possessions.
- Though each U.S. territory has a different prior ownership history, commonalities do exist. Commonalties include being originally inhabited by indigenous people, being owned by at least one other colonial power and being bought at some point by the United States Government thus becoming a U.S. Possession. The U.S. Virgin Islands as an example was occupied and/or conquered and owned by the following groups in sequential order are Ciboney, Caribs, and Arawaks, Spanish, Holland, France, England, Spain, Denmark and the Knights of Malta, Danish, Dutch & Danish, United States in 1917
- Territorial status was rooted in separate and unequal philosophies. An 1898 Supreme Court ruling cited “uncivilized” and “alien race,” in reference to one U.S. territory.

Systemic Issues Related to Human Services Access for People with Disabilities

- Access to care and services is perhaps the single most important variable in determining the quality of a provider organization or administration.
- The greater the degree of personal and familial involvement in care decisions, the better.
- Access to preventative care and early intervention services are critical for positive treatment outcomes.
- Integrative and coordinated care service models improve outcomes.
- Access to the current best practices, equipment, and treatment modalities improve outcomes for people with disabilities.
- Each of these domains represents a current challenge for people with disabilities seeking to access services from Human Services funded agencies across the 50 states.

Unique Challenges for People with Disabilities in the Territories

- Many traditional models of service delivery for people with disabilities are simply not available in the U.S. territories due to disparities in funding, infrastructure challenges and lack of territorial capacity.
 - Disproportionate funding related to State Assistive Technology Act Funding
 - Exclusion from national data projects of national significance
 - Research and Demonstration Program to Improve Coordinated Transportation Systems for People with Disabilities and Older Adults absent from the territories
- Systemic fiscal weakness
- Few avenues for reprisal. Many territories already under several non enforceable federal consent decrees related to education, medical care & transportation

Improving Outcomes

- Recognize the unique demographic challenges for people living in the territories including
 - Systematic oppression
 - Poverty
 - Rurality
 - Capacity
- Equalize State funding for the territories equal to U.S. States
- Advocacy towards equalized and uncapped Medicaid funding
- Partnerships with department of the interior for earmarked funds for infrastructure improvements to support people with disabilities in the territories.
- Partnerships with strong partners in other states and funding to help build capacity to begin and successfully maintain existing HHS programs available elsewhere.
 - Veterans Directed Care
 - Accessible transportation initiatives