People with disabilities are—as they have always been—an indispensable part of the American story. From trailblazing figures like abolitionist and women’s suffragist Harriet Tubman, who lived with a traumatic brain injury and a seizure disorder, to blind scholar Jacobus tenBroek, who laid the groundwork for the disability rights laws we have today, people with disabilities have not only pushed us to be a more just and welcoming country, but in the process have made America stronger by ensuring we could draw on the talents and capacity of every American. Today, one in four Americans live with a disability—some visible, some less so. They are our friends, family members, co-workers, CEOs, and first responders; our teachers, physicians, and athletes. They are past presidents and senators such as Abraham Lincoln, who lived with depression, and Tammy Duckworth, a Veteran and Purple Heart recipient; activists such as Deafblind lawyer Haben Girma, who advocates that disability is an opportunity for innovation, and beloved artists and actors like Stevie Wonder and Ali Stroker. People with disabilities can and do live independent, dignified, self-affirming lives, and add incalculable value to the American story.

Yet in all facets of daily life, people with disabilities must contend with physical and invisible obstacles. These obstacles have been built up by a society—often apathetically, sometimes deliberately—that has long ignored the needs of people with disabilities. 560,000 people with disability, for example, rarely leave their home because transportation is not accessible to them. Over 100,000 workers with disabilities can legally be paid subminimum wages, some as little as four cents an hour. And in almost 20 states, parents diagnosed with a disability can lose custody of their children. From riding the subway in cities to experiencing a segregated education because of low academic expectations, or being unable to find or maintain a job because of the lack of employment supports, people with disabilities must learn to navigate a world that all too frequently wasn’t built with them in mind. And these hurdles are even higher for people with disabilities who belong to other marginalized groups. This reality must change.

As President, Pete will build a culture of belonging for everyone. He is committed to systematically dismantling institutions that discriminate against people with disabilities, and, with and alongside them, helping to build a new, long-overdue era for this community. Pete will retrofit our government so it works for—and not against—people with disabilities. He will help bring about a society that intuitively sees, accounts for, welcomes, and values their lived experiences.

Pete will work with Congress to end the shameful subminimum wage by passing a $15 minimum wage that applies to everyone equally. He will make equity-based inclusive education a national expectation, and ensure that people who have disabilities maximize their time in general education and receive the support necessary for success. Through Pete’s Medicare for All Who Want It plan, everyone will have access to comprehensive and affordable health coverage. He will make transforming our broken mental health care system a national priority by investing $300 billion to improve mental health and addiction care.

---

2 American Association of People with Disabilities and The Leadership Conference Education Fund. “Equity in Transportation for People with Disabilities.”
3 “Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) List.” Wage and Hour Division (WHD). July 1, 2019
care in communities across the country, and enforcing mental health parity. Pete will also work to guarantee that every American can actively participate in the democratic process by making the voting process and polling places accessible to everyone.

Since decades-old programs were designed to further disable people with disabilities and keep them on the margins, Pete knows that we need both a massive shift in federal policies, and a more inclusive and welcoming society. That’s why he will use the office of the presidency—and all the levers of government available to him—to tirelessly advocate for people with disabilities, so they no longer have to do it on their own.

**Pete’s key policies include:**
- End the subminimum wage.
- Make inclusive education a national expectation.
- Fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Eliminate the “benefit cliff” for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and update critical Supplemental Security Income thresholds.
- Ensure that people with disabilities can receive long-term care in their home and community by supporting the Disability Integration Act.
- Lower burdens on unpaid family caregivers, including by providing credit toward Social Security.

**Key outcomes include:**
- Double labor force participation rates of people with disabilities by 2030, the 40th anniversary of the Americans with Disability Act.
- Ensure 85% of students with intellectual disabilities and multiple disabilities are in the general education classroom for 80% or more of the day by the end of the 2025 school year.
- End corporal punishment, restraint, and seclusion in schools.
- Ensure that air travel is accessible and require all new transportation projects with federal funding to be certified as 100% accessible.
- Stop parents with disabilities from losing custody or adoption rights based on the fact that they have a disability.
- Eliminate the 24-month waiting period for Medicare coverage so SSDI recipients get Medicare as soon as they are made eligible, saving 10,000 to 20,000 lives per year over the next decade.
- Help ensure that people with disabilities participate in disaster preparedness efforts and, after a disaster, can return to their homes and communities.
- Make the voting process and polling places accessible to everyone.
- Ensure full high-speed broadband coverage for everyone through an $80 billion Internet For All initiative and make net neutrality the law of the land.
- Develop an Accessible Technology Bill of Rights as a gold standard for government and private uses of smart technologies.

### COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

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.\(^5\) For Black Americans with disabilities, the employment rate is less than two in ten.\(^6\) Moreover, a person with a disability is twice as likely to be poor as a person who does not.\(^7\) Pete is committed to dramatically increasing opportunities for competitive integrated employment as written in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Embracing Senator Tom Harkin’s goal, Pete will work to double labor force participation for people with disabilities by 2030, the 40th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), with a focus on closing racial inequities. To do this, among other actions his administration will:

- **End the subminimum wage.** It is unacceptable that people with disabilities are exempted from minimum wage laws. Over 100,000 workers, primarily with severe disabilities, are currently paid a subminimum wage. Pete will end the subminimum wage by repealing Section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act and supporting the Transformation to Competitive Employment and Raise the Wage Acts. He will support capacity building to help with the transition from sheltered workshops to competitive integrated employment.

- **Issue an Executive Order to increase hiring across our federal workforce of people with disabilities, including veterans.** Pete will build on President Obama’s Executive Order 13548 and make the federal government the model employer that it should be. Pete will also ensure that federal agencies are fully committed to the employment of individuals with disabilities. This includes fully implementing and enforcing section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act to strengthen agencies’ affirmative action efforts for people with disabilities.\(^8\)

- **Create a national network of apprenticeships and an Internships for All program that provide greater opportunities for competitive integrated employment.** Pete’s administration will invest $5 billion over the next decade in a national apprenticeship program that ensures access to a well-paying job—especially for people 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. Pete 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.

- **Increase federal subcontracting with disability-owned businesses, including by enforcing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act.** Pete will also 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 people with disabilities.

- **Ensure all working Americans have access to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave.** People with disabilities who are working and care providers are more likely to be precariously employed and less likely to have jobs that offer paid leave than workers overall. Without paid leave and other workplace supports for employees with disabilities, employers may force them to leave jobs, reduce their hours, or deny them promotions. Pete supports the FAMILY Act, which provides at least 12 weeks of paid family leave per year, and enhancing its benefits to include caregiving responsibilities for siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, and chosen family members. Pete’s administration will also decouple medical leave benefits from family care and new child leave benefits to provide a longer total potential leave for workers.

- **Ensure all workers have access to paid sick leave.** In addition to passing the Healthy Families Act, Pete will set up a national system of paid sick leave, as outlined in his Empowering Workers plan, that creates a fund for workers that employers pay into.

---

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Equitable opportunity for all students means that every child with a disability has access to high-quality, inclusive public education. Today, this is not the case. Students with disabilities are disproportionately segregated, suspended, and have lower high school graduation rates. Pete is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities get the public education they deserve. As President, he will:

- **Make inclusive education a national expectation, and ensure 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.** Inclusive schools benefit both students with disabilities and those without. Yet students with disabilities, especially disabled students of color, are still segregated from general education classrooms at unacceptable rates, and the current administration delayed the Equity in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulation. We must create an expectation of inclusion so classrooms represent our society’s diversity. That’s why Pete 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 and ensure that teachers can better help students who have disabilities feel safe and supported.

- **Ensure students with disabilities can learn in a safe and supportive environment, including by reducing bullying and ending corporal punishment, restraint, and seclusion.** Students with disabilities continue to be bullied by their peers and subject to inhumane disciplinary action such as restraints and seclusion.\(^{14}\) 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.\(^{15}\) Pete will support the [Ending Corporal Punishment in School Act](#) and encourage states to pass legislation that eliminates suspensions for discretionary infractions such as “disrespect” infractions, where bias is most likely to seep in. He will also 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.

- **Fully fund the IDEA.** The federal government must fulfill its promise of funding 40 percent of special education. Last year, Congress authorized less than 15% of the government’s share.\(^{16}\) This burdens states and districts who must make up the difference and punishes special education students with fewer resources and opportunities for an equitable education. Fully funding IDEA will help schools hire and retain more highly qualified special education teachers and provide more services to students with disabilities.

- **Improve student mental health, which has deteriorated at an alarming rate.** Today, 70 percent of teenagers feel that anxiety and depression are major problems among their peers.\(^{17}\) Most tragically, suicide has doubled among middle school students—for the first time in recent history, more die by suicide than from car crashes—and has increased by over 50 percent among high school students.\(^{18}\) Pete will expand the mental health workforce into schools by supporting the Mental Health in Schools Act and requiring every school nationwide to teach [Mental Health First Aid](#), a course that helps people identify and respond to mental health disabilities.

- **Build on the promise and success of the Autism CARES Act.** Federal investments from the previous iteration of this law improved support for early intervention and research, but there is still much to be done to support autistic people across their lifespan.\(^{19}\) Pete will build on the Act by supporting greater investment in research on the needs of autistic adults and services and supports that aid self-determination, incentivizing partnerships between researchers and autistic people, and increasing representation of self-advocates on the Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee and throughout the federal government, including through autistic-led initiatives.

---

*\(^{14}\) National Bullying Prevention Center. “[Bullying and Harassment of Students with Disabilities](#).” 2019.
\(^{15}\) Abamu, Jenny and Rob Manning. “[Desperation And Broken Trust When Schools Restrain Students Or Lock Them In Rooms](#).” NPR. June 5, 2019.
\(^{16}\) Losen, Daniel., Cheri Hodson, Michael A. Keith II, Katrina Morrison, Shakti Belway. “[Are We Closing the School Discipline Gap](#)?” The Center for Civil Rights Remedies. February, 2015.
\(^{18}\) Association of University Centers on Disabilities. “[Autism CARES Act](#).”*
● **Promote access to effective communication and language-rich environments in schools.** Students with communication disabilities who lack access to both Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and language-rich services and supports frequently experience worse outcomes. Nearly one million Americans are functionally Deaf, and 90 percent of Deaf children are born to hearing parents.\(^{20,21}\) Professionals often encourage families to focus on spoken language, which can lead to Deaf children not acquiring a fully developed language in critical early years.\(^{22}\) As adults, language deprivation can impact literacy and contribute to unemployment.\(^{23}\) Pete will work with the Department of Education to issue guidance and provide technical assistance to schools on robust AAC, effective communication, and language-rich environments, from early intervention through transitions to college and careers.

● **Increase funding to recruit, support, and retain special education teachers.** Pete will increase funding for the Personnel Preparation program by almost $70 million to $150 million,\(^ {24}\) with a focus on improving interdisciplinary practices between general and special education and mental health, ensuring special education teachers are prepared for inclusive and integrated teaching models in general education, and ending special education teacher shortages—especially in rural schools. Pete will also diversify the teacher workforce, as outlined in his [Douglass Plan](#), and support improved recruitment, support, and retention of Deaf teachers in Deaf schools.

● **Expand 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. Pete 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.

● **Ensure services for students with disabilities don’t end in high school.** For students with disabilities, the transition from high school to college or career can pose major challenges.\(^ {25}\) Programs that fund special education services in K-12 schools aren't 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. Pete’s 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. And he will task an interagency working group with publishing best practices for higher education institutions serving disabled students.\(^ {26}\)

\(^{24}\)“Fiscal Year 2019 Budget.” Department of Education. 2018.
○ **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.\(^27\) Almost all survivors of sexual violence experience PTSD symptoms shortly following the attack.\(^28\) Pete’s 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 his Building Power plan. Pete 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 he 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.

### CIVIL RIGHTS

Pete will appoint someone to lead the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Civil Rights Division—the office that oversees compliance for the ADA and other laws—who understands the disability community and will enforce these laws. To advance civil rights for people with disabilities, he will:

- **Reinvigorate enforcement of Olmstead v. L.C. and the ADA in the DOJ Civil Rights Division.** The Supreme Court held in *Olmstead v. L.C.* that people with disabilities may not be segregated simply because of their disabilities. Two decades after that decision, we are still seeing violations,\(^29\) and we need to ensure that *Olmstead*, as well as the rest of the ADA, is properly enforced. Pete will prioritize enforcement and aggressively protect the rights of disabled people.

- **Improve ADA compliance by lowering barriers to understanding one’s rights and making it easier to report problems.** Pete’s administration will create an accessible form that shows one’s rights, including for education and housing. Parents or guardians will be able to (1) easily understand what rights their child has in school, (2) know what authoritative information to point school officials to, and (3) easily report their school as non-compliant when that is the case. The form will be available in multiple formats and languages, including American Sign Language (ASL), based on the needs of people with disabilities and their caregivers. This reporting system will improve oversight and enforcement by lowering the barrier to report civil rights violations.

- **Make sure that parents with disabilities do not lose custody or adoption rights based on the fact that they have a disability.** The right to raise a family with dignity and respect is a value we all share, and Pete’s administration will lead in combating bias and stigma against parents with disabilities—especially disabled parents of color—and ensure federal policies better support them, from improving training in family services and revisiting Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) policies to better support parents.

---

● **Reduce incarceration by 50 percent.** The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, and experts agree that far too many people are locked up unnecessarily. People with disabilities are highly overrepresented in prisons. Pete will increase federal grant funding for civil legal aid and invest in diversion programs suited for people with disabilities.

● **Protect individuals with disabilities who are incarcerated and often lack necessary treatment and care.** Pete will ensure that ADA regulations are properly enforced in jails and prisons and increase oversight in federal facilities to ensure compliance. He will also eliminate the Medicaid exception for people who are incarcerated so they have access to quality medical treatment.

● **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. Pete’s 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. Further, 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. As in his **Securing Justice** plan, Pete will invest in rigorous law enforcement training and require de-escalation and higher standards for use of force for all police interactions.

---

**SOCIAL SECURITY**

For too many people with disabilities, the American dream remains out of reach. In 2018, the unemployment rate among people with disabilities was more than twice the rate for those without disabilities. And median annual earnings for workers with disabilities are just $23,000. Medicare, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)—programs targeted for cuts by the Trump administration—are too often the only things keeping these individuals afloat. To make it easier for people with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, Pete will:

● **Eliminate the “benefit cliff” for SSDI, so benefits gradually phase out until recipients reach nearly $45,000 in annual earnings.** Under the current SSDI system, when a program

---

33 Ibid.
38 The exact threshold is $44,248.80. In the years after this policy is implemented, the threshold will be set according to the following formula: \[\text{SGA threshold} + [2 \times \text{the average benefit of people below the SGA threshold}]\].
participant earns more than $1,220 in monthly wages ($14,640 annually), they lose their entire benefit. This makes it hard for recipients to maintain economic security. A gradual phase-out will allow SSDI recipients to keep part of their benefits even as they earn higher wages, thus incentivizing work without cutting support for people in need. Benefits will fall by just 50 cents for every additional dollar in earnings for the “average” SSDI recipient, and the phaseout rate will be more gradual for those receiving smaller benefits.

- Eliminate SSDI’s ineffective current work incentives. Today, beneficiaries may earn above $1,220 for nine months without having their benefits reduced as part of a “Trial Work Period” (TWP); they are then eligible for a 36-month “Extended Period of Eligibility” (EPE) during which they receive benefits only for months in which their earnings are below $1,220. Pete will eliminate the TWP and EPE and allow beneficiaries to receive partial benefits at wage levels between $1,220 and $3,687, with the benefit amounts fluctuating as recipients’ wages change. Pete will fully fund all continuing medical disability reviews to ensure that individuals receive the appropriate benefits. To encourage work among SSDI recipients who worry about not being able to reenroll, Pete will give all former SSDI beneficiaries who lose their jobs access to the expedited reinstatement process.

- Reduce the excessive wait times for SSDI and SSI appeals cases. Despite the Social Security Administration’s (SSA) concerns, the number of pending appeals has increased over 20 percent since 2010. Between 2000 and 2018, the average wait time for an appeals decision rose from just over 250 days to 595 days. As of July 2018, nearly 700,000 cases remained unresolved, some from as far back as 2011. This creates significant hardship; a bipartisan group of former Social Security Administrators stated that while a hearing is pending, “virtually all of the people waiting have no earnings, so that many lose their homes and their families, and some even die.”

This is inhumane—and the current administration is making the problem worse. The SSA instituted the Compassionate And Responsive Service (CARES) plan in 2016 to reduce excessive wait times for appeals cases. Despite initial headway, funding cuts have slowed progress. Pete will fully fund the CARES program so people in need of benefits can receive them. He will also exempt the SSA’s administrative budget from sequestration.

---

38 This “benefit cliff” is formally known as the “Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) Threshold”. It rises in line with average wage growth every year and will rise to $1,260 in 2020: See Social Security, “Substantial Gainful Activity.”
43 This is in addition to the seven months spent on the first three stages of the SSDI application process.
44 “Sequestration.” Congressional Budget Office.
Enable SSDI participants to start receiving income benefits as soon as they are admitted to the program. This is especially critical because, for nearly two of five beneficiaries, SSDI is their only source of income.\textsuperscript{46,47}

Eliminate the 24-month waiting period for Medicare coverage, so SSDI recipients get Medicare as soon as they are made eligible. Under current law, once SSDI recipients begin receiving income benefits, they must wait another 24 months before they gain access to Medicare. When added to the five-month delay for income benefits, this means that SSDI recipients wait 29 months for proper insurance coverage. More than one out of nine SSDI recipients die during this waiting period.\textsuperscript{48} This reform is expected to save 10,000 to 20,000 lives per year over the next decade.

Eliminate the special waiting periods for Americans with ALS. Pete endorses the bipartisan ALS Disability Insurance Access Act, which would eliminate the waiting period for income benefits for individuals with ALS.\textsuperscript{49} He will also eliminate the one-month waiting period during which SSDI recipients with ALS are barred from Medicare coverage.\textsuperscript{50}

Update critical SSI thresholds. Many SSI thresholds are outdated. First, individuals are only allowed to earn $65 per month—for every dollar more, their benefits are reduced by 50 cents. The $65 threshold was set in 1974 and is not indexed to inflation or earnings growth, which is why Pete will make sure it rises in line with median wage growth every year. Second, SSI benefits are reduced dollar-for-dollar for all unearned income above the $20 monthly unearned income disregard threshold. For instance, a 70-year-old receiving $320 in monthly Social Security benefits has her SSI benefits cut by $300. This threshold also has not risen since 1974. Third, people with disabilities are only eligible for SSI if they have $2,000 or less in assets or $3,000 for a couple, which is often a disincentive to get married. This threshold has not risen to account for inflation since 1989. Pete will index the unearned income disregard threshold and the asset threshold to inflation, allowing people to receive greater assistance as their costs of living rise.

LONG-TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

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. To this end, Pete will:

Ensure that people with disabilities have the option of receiving long-term services and supports in their home and community. People with disabilities can still be denied access to community-based care by their insurer, which infringes on their liberty and security. To ensure


\textsuperscript{47} On average, SSDI benefits are 58% of recipients’ total incomes. (See source in footnote above.)


community integration for people with disabilities and the supports to live and receive services to live independently in their own homes, Pete will support the Disability Integration Act.

- **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.** Pete 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.

Pete will strive to create many more, and better, direct care jobs while investing in workforce training so we can age with dignity and care. By turning care jobs into better jobs, we can also reshape our economy while lowering health care costs. Pete is committed to shifting how our culture values care, and will:

- **Raise the minimum wage to $15 an hour and leverage the power of the federal government to raise standards for pay, benefits, and training for direct care workers.** Pete will continue to raise standards by creating a national Direct Care Workforce Standards Board, composed of direct care workers and their representatives, providers, consumers and consumer advocacy groups, to advise relevant agencies on direct care workforce issues such as rate setting recommendations, compensation, benefits, and training.

- **Reduce barriers to participant-directed services and supports.** All consumers of long-term services and supports should be able to direct their own services or appoint a person of their choice should they wish to. Pete will also provide federal grants for states to create online matching service registries and job boards that match consumers to caregivers based on location, availability, skills, and preferences.

- **Reduce the burden on unpaid family caregivers, including by providing credit toward Social Security.** There are over 40 million unpaid caregivers in America, one in four of whom are millennials, and two in three of whom are women. Unpaid family caregivers can incur high out-of-pocket costs—an average of 20 percent of their income. Pete will:
  - Make sure that Social Security finally recognizes caregiving as work. For a given period of years, the caregiver of a child, senior, or dependent with a disability will be awarded credit toward Social Security benefits as if they earned 50 percent of the average earnings of a full-time, year-round worker.
  - Remove barriers to home- and community-based services for individuals in need of long-term services and supports, so family caregivers aren’t forced to fill in the gaps.
  - Ensure that all family caregivers have access to community-based, culturally, and linguistically appropriate services and supports, including training and respite care.
  - Provide targeted funding to support family caregivers living in and caring for family members in rural and underserved communities.

---

51 National Center on Caregiving at Family Caregiver Alliance. “Caregiver Statistics: Demographics,” 2015
ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

Over 18 million Americans with disabilities face barriers to travel, including more than five million who use wheelchairs. Although the ADA prohibits discrimination in public transportation, inadequate funding and enforcement have still left too many barriers for people with disabilities. Pete will strive to ensure that all transportation systems, especially public transit, are safe and accessible for all. He will:

- **Modernize public transit systems.** High-quality public transit is a critical part of an equitable and accessible transportation system, especially since 26 percent of people with disabilities do not own cars. Pete will invest $100 billion over 10 years in surface transportation for cities, which will include modernizing and increasing the number of subways, buses, and other transit systems so that they are ADA-compliant and provide safe and reliable service. He will ensure that federal funds are available to create accessible rural public transportation options, including new rural transit hubs, as described in his [Securing a Healthy Future for Rural America](https://example.com) plan.

- **Require transportation projects with federal funding to be certified as 100 percent accessible.** In order to ensure that the provisions of the ADA are fully enforced, the federal government will require state and local governments to certify that transportation projects are 100 percent accessible before federal funds are released. All projects must have appropriate accommodations for the needs of people with both chronic physical and mental health conditions, such as adequate staff training and a supply of accessible vehicles. For older components of existing transportation systems that were constructed before the ADA took effect, state and local governments will need to develop realistic, achievable plans to reach full accessibility before they receive federal funds.

- **Incentivize private taxi and ridesharing companies to offer accessible services.** To ensure that all Americans have access to transportation when they need it, Pete’s Department of Transportation (DOT) will vigorously enforce the ADA’s non-discrimination policies for private companies, with a special focus on ridesharing companies. Pete will also use the federal procurement processes to incentivize companies to make vehicle fleets more accessible. Taxis and ridesharing companies will receive technical assistance from DOT to increase the quality and frequency of their paratransit services.

- **Expand accessible transportation in rural communities.** Pete’s administration will support expanding and replicating successful pilot programs, such as partnerships with ridesharing companies, that reduce wait times and increase reliable and accessible services. CMS will increase the number and type of vendors that can provide accessible, non-emergency medical transportation services. Pete will expand federal grant programs like TIGER Grants and increase resources for the Rural Transit Assistance Program to support collaboration between local

---

55 Transportation.” American Association of People with Disabilities. 2018.
government, nonprofits, and private companies on expanding door-to-door paratransit service in rural areas.

- **Ensure that air travel is accessible.** Airlines damage or lose an average of 25 wheelchairs a day.\(^{56}\) Pete will push to modify the Air Carrier Access Act to provide increased statutory protections and improved enforcement. He will incentivize airlines and airports to train all personnel who interface with passengers or handle luggage to handle wheelchairs and other mobility devices correctly and to improve etiquette when working with passengers with disabilities. And he will collaborate with disability groups and the airline industry to explore modifying federal regulations, so wheelchairs can be tied down inside of airplane cabins rather than stored below.

- **Promote safe streets accessible to everyone.** Nearly 6,000 pedestrians were killed in traffic accidents in 2017.\(^{57}\) Pete will incentivize states to work with cities and counties to build accessible roadways, especially along transit lines, and adopt complete streets policies including accessible sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals. Transportation systems cannot be accessible if roadways make no pedestrian accommodations.

## HEALTH CARE

Americans with disabilities face many challenges and barriers when interacting with the health care system. These include offices that are inaccessible, examination rooms that cannot accommodate those with physical or communication disabilities, lack of adaptive equipment, and inadequate transportation. In many situations, the health care workforce is not optimally trained to interact, communicate, and engage with those who have disabilities.\(^{58}\) Having a disability is a major contributor to health care disparities. Pete will invest in the prevention of chronic diseases, as adults with disabilities are three times more likely to have a stroke, heart disease, diabetes, or cancer than those without a disability.\(^{59}\) To advance comprehensive, affordable health care for all, Pete will:

- **Ensure that all people with disabilities have an affordable coverage alternative through Medicare for All Who Want It.** Through Pete’s Medicare for All Who Want It plan, anyone will be able to opt in to an affordable, comprehensive public plan.

- **Make it easier for people with disabilities to receive health care at or near their home by expanding access to telehealth.** Pete will massively expand coverage of high-speed Internet nationwide, especially in rural areas; help health providers purchase and implement telehealth technology by doubling funding for the Federal Communication Commission’s Rural Health Care Program; and expand the types of care settings eligible for reimbursement for telehealth services. Lastly, Pete will ensure full high-speed broadband coverage, as detailed in his plan for rural communities, *A Commitment to America’s Heartland*.

---


• Increase federal funding to develop and study integrated care models for individuals with disability. The existing health care delivery system is fragmented, and services for persons with disabilities or functional limitations are piecemeal, reactive, and often not coordinated. Pete will expand testing of new integrated models of care, such as the Patient-Centered Medical Home, to better understand and address chronic and acute health issues.

• Dramatically reduce drug prices for everyone, including people with chronic illnesses, as outlined in his Affordable Medicines for All plan. Pete will empower the federal government to negotiate drug prices, cap monthly out-of-pocket drug costs at $200 a month for people on Medicare, and expand investment in developing and manufacturing new medicines. For “worst offender” pharmaceutical companies that refuse to negotiate or continue to price egregiously, exercise the government’s “eminent domain” rights to tame high drug prices. His policies will reduce median annual out-of-pocket drug spending for middle class Americans on Medicare Part D living with cancer by at least $5,100 and by at least $2,000 for those living with certain immune disorders, such as rheumatoid arthritis or multiple sclerosis.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Pete will provide every American with access to comprehensive mental health and addiction services as outlined in his Health and Belonging in America plan. Pete’s plan focuses on strengthening communities and community systems of care to help people with a mental health disability thrive wherever they feel most comfortable. In particular, he will:

• Ensure that every American has access to comprehensive coverage for mental health care. To achieve this, Pete will enforce mental health parity in health care coverage, dramatically expanding 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.

• Dramatically increase access to community-based mental health care services and quality of life in communities through annual $10 billion Healing and Belonging grants. These grants will allow for local communities to invest in interventions and structures that could most positively impact mental health. Communities might choose to invest in a range of innovations, from social programs that drive impact around the social determinants of health to clinical programs that create novel ways for people to gain access to care both within clinical and community settings. To read more about these grants, please refer to Pete’s Health and Belonging in America plan to address mental health and combat addiction.

• Raise awareness of the pervasiveness of trauma and how fundamentally it affects overall health, and expand care that is trauma-informed. The experience of trauma is associated with

---

60 Cubanski, Juliette, Koma, Wyatt, Neuman, Tricia. “The out-of-pocket cost burden for specialty drugs in Medicare Part D.” Kaiser Family Foundation. February 1, 2019. See Figure 2.

chronic mental and physical health conditions and disabilities like post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use, depression, and cardiovascular disease. Care informed by trauma acknowledges that what a person has been through profoundly impacts their health and helps create a safe, supportive, and respectful care environment. To expand trauma-informed care, Pete will:

- Direct the U.S. Surgeon General to study trauma and its effects.
- Ensure that Medicare beneficiaries receive trauma-informed care and incentivize state Medicaid programs to pay for trauma-informed care and services.
- Expand funding for local efforts to train clinicians to provide trauma-informed care.

**VOTING RIGHTS**

While voter participation among people with disabilities has increased since 2000, disparities with non-disabled voters remain. Pete will remove barriers to voting for Americans with disabilities, including by passing a 21st Century Voting Rights Act to expand voting access and end voter suppression.

- **Expand access to the ballot.** Registration must be made easier and accessible by introducing automatic, online, and same-day registration; allowing portable registration within states; ensuring accessibility for registration materials and notices regarding purges; and expanding agencies designated to provide voter registration to include disability service providers.

- **Make voting easier.** Voting must be made more accessible with early voting and no-reason vote-by-mail, as well as expanded funding for accessible voting machines. Pete’s administration will learn from the best practices of states that have engaged remote ballot marking for disabled and the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act to ensure equitable accessibility. He will also work to reform capricious and uneven laws that allow judges to remove voting rights from people using outdated classifications and understandings of mental health.

- **Increase accessibility at polling places.** In 2016, almost 60 percent of polling places inspected on Election Day had at least one obstacle for people with disabilities. As President, Pete will nominate individuals with strong records on disability rights to the Electoral Assistance Commission, champion greater accessibility training for poll workers, and support the Rebuild America’s Schools Act of 2019 that includes funds to improve voting access at schools, which are common polling locations. Pete will also fight efforts to use the ADA as a pretext to close polling locations and disenfranchise voters, especially Black Americans and Native Americans.

- **Use the full power of the federal government to combat voter suppression.** This includes voter ID laws, which disproportionately impact people with disabilities, people of color, seniors, and low-income individuals, and burden them with additional costs for IDs. Pete will neutralize the effects of restrictive and discriminator state voter ID laws with provisions such as allowing

---


63 Report: Voter Turnout Surges Among People with Disabilities” Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations.


66 “Oppose Voter ID Legislation - Fact Sheet.” American Civil Liberties Union.
people to vote with a sworn written statement of identity and preventing flawed methods of verification that impact people with disabilities, like signature consistency.

**HOUSING**

All people with disabilities deserve access to safe, affordable, and accessible housing. Pete 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.

- **Ensure people with disabilities can find safe and affordable housing and live in inclusive communities by reinstating the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule.** This rule ensures that states, local governments, and public housing authorities combat segregation, foster inclusive communities, and improve housing opportunities for individuals in need, including people with disabilities.

- **Appoint a Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) who will promote accessible, affordable housing for people with disabilities.** Pete will also strengthen the HUD Office of Civil Rights to better protect people with disabilities from housing discrimination.

- **Combat the epidemic of homelessness among individuals with disabilities.** Pete will invest in mental health care and supportive services that reduce the number of individuals with mental illnesses who experience homelessness, 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.

- **Build a national database of accessible and affordable housing to enable individuals with disabilities to easily find housing that meets their needs.** Too often, developers struggle to find tenants for accessible housing units while individuals with disabilities cannot find housing that meets their needs. Pete will charge his HUD Secretary to develop a national registry of accessible and affordable housing based on the successful example of MassAccess in Massachusetts.

- **Dramatically increase accessible public housing by prioritizing accessibility in new construction and rehabilitation.** Pete will invest in the Housing Trust Fund to rehabilitate and stabilize existing public housing stock, increase public housing units nationwide, and expand support for Section 8 vouchers and Section 811 supportive housing for people with disabilities. Pete will also fully enforce Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to expand requirements for federally-funded housing developments to include accessible units.

- **Eliminate housing discrimination based on source of income by amending the Fair Housing Act** to reduce barriers to individuals renting housing with Section 8 vouchers or SSI income.
• 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. Pete will expand public funding for accessibility improvements to public and private housing, including rental housing, via grants and tax credits.

CLIMATE AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

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

• 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. Pete’s 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. He 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. In addition, Pete supports the Real Emergency Access for Aging and Disability Inclusion for Disasters Act and the Disaster Relief Medicaid Acts.

• Include representation from communities, including the disability and senior communities, in Regional Resilience Hubs and other disaster preparedness planning forums. As outlined in Pete’s disaster preparedness plan, Resilient Communities, his administration’s Regional Resilience Hubs will have a Board of Advisors that includes elected officials, community leaders, and citizens.

• 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.

INCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGY

Technology can be a tremendous asset to people with disabilities, but it must be accessible, usable, and understandable. Inclusive technology can make classrooms and workplaces more accessible while also saving costs for employers. As President, Pete will affirm America’s leadership in innovation to:

• 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. Pete will ensure all unserved communities have affordable, high-speed broadband coverage.

• Prioritize the goal of full digital inclusion across all federal agencies to ensure that Americans with disabilities can access all the benefits of technology. Pete will 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.

• 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.

• Task the Justice Department to finish issuing regulations on website accessibility under the ADA, which the Trump administration has withdrawn.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

A Buttigieg administration will promote the equal rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities worldwide, including efforts aimed at inclusion, belonging, and inherent dignity as codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. To advance the rights of people with disabilities globally, Pete will:

• Strongly support ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Negotiated by President George W. Bush and signed by President Obama in 2009, the treaty has been ratified by 180 countries. The Convention aims to transform attitudes and approaches towards people with disabilities as individuals with rights who can make free and informed decisions, rather than objects of charity who need to be treated and cared for by society. Despite bipartisan support, the Senate failed to ratify it. Ratification is critical for the United States to be a global champion of equal rights.

• Develop a national strategy for disability-inclusive international development. Pete will commit to achieving the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals by extending the

---

70 “A System to Help You Design and Write Content for VA.gov.” VA Design System.
71 “18F Accessibility Guide.” 18F.
benefits of development to all. Pete will also fully implement the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Disability Policy to strengthen disability rights and inclusion overseas.

- **Advance the human rights of persons with disabilities globally.** Pete will develop targeted assistance initiatives that provide advocacy, livelihood opportunities, capacity support, and protection from hate crimes. New culturally and linguistically appropriate programs would raise awareness about persons with disabilities and their rights, promote local advocacy initiatives, document hate crimes, and build the capacity of local disability organizations.

- **Support U.S. agencies engaged in international development to ensure their programs and outreach are fully inclusive.** Pete will make sure that agencies including USAID, the Department of State, Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation have the tools to enable their programs to be accessible for all—including by enabling physical accessibility at all U.S. embassies and consulates, providing interpreters for public diplomacy programs, and tailoring outreach to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in volunteer programs and development projects.

- **Bolster human rights reporting and diplomacy.** Pete will strengthen the Department of State’s disability-related human rights reporting to expose human rights abuses faced by persons with disabilities around the world. Information will be used to raise formal concerns in bilateral dialogues and offer support for solutions. Persons with disabilities and their advocates will be included in U.S. diplomacy and bilateral relations, including in senior foreign policy positions.