



November 12, 2021

Michelle Bachelet Jeria  
High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

**Re: Consultation on mental health and human rights for persons with disabilities**

Dear Ms. Bachelet Jeria,

I am writing on behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA)<sup>1</sup> in response to the recent call for submissions to discuss the best ways to harmonize national laws, policies, and practices relating to mental health with the norms of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. APA has special consultative status with ECOSOC, is affiliated with the U.N.'s Department of Global Communications, and has an active team of volunteer psychologists advocating at the U.N. Headquarters in New York. We would like to bring to your attention significant APA documents that may be helpful to you in preparing for your upcoming report to be presented at the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the U.N. Human Rights Council. We also greatly appreciate the opportunity to share our positive experiences in reforming mental health systems, and our model for moving from practice to policy.

One of our association's strategic priorities is to make a positive impact on critical societal issues through the application of psychological science and practice. A vital part of our work includes the development of policies and guidelines to support our membership in their professional activities. For example, APA's 2021 [Resolution on APA, Psychology and Human Rights](#) encourages psychologists to support and advocate for populations at risk of human rights violations, including marginalized populations both domestically and globally, and commits the association to adopting a human rights framework to underlie its work.

Previously, APA affirmed in its 2014 policy resolution in [Support of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) that it will advocate for public policies that support global change toward the elimination of practices and conditions oppressive to people with disabilities. APA also encourages the inclusion and involvement of people with disability identities in research, information and technology, public policy, and advocacy.

In 2011, APA developed [Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention with Persons with Disabilities](#) to provide psychologists with general principles and approaches to: (1) working with people with disabilities, including on matters related to accessibility, communication, and relationship skills; (2)

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<sup>1</sup> APA is the nation's largest scientific and professional nonprofit organization representing the discipline and profession of psychology, as well as over 122,000 members and affiliates who are clinicians, researchers, educators, consultants, and students in psychological science. APA also serves as convener of the Global Psychology Alliance, a group of 68 psychology associations from around the world that have joined together to promote the understanding and application of psychological science to address global concerns

selecting appropriate measures and adaptation of measures; and (3) implementing clinical services, including frameworks for disability-sensitive and disability-affirmative therapy. The first section of these Guidelines provides information on disability awareness, training, accessibility, and diversity, while the latter sections address testing, assessment, and interventions. Please note that the revised version of these Guidelines is due to be released in February 2022.

Additionally, APA has adopted the following policies in support of physical and communication environments that are free of barriers and inclusive of people with disabilities:

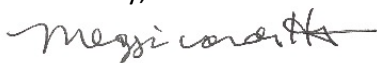
- 1) [2019 Resolution on Support of Universal Design and Accessibility in Education, Training, and Practice](#)
- 2) [2008 Resolution on the Americans with Disabilities Act](#)
- 3) [1997 Policy Statement on Full Participation for Psychologists with Disabilities](#)

APA translates the practices and ideals of its membership into policy through select work groups comprised of members with subject matter expertise, training, and in many cases, lived experience. This model for connecting practices to policies relies on APA's diverse membership, which includes clinicians, researchers, educators, and students. Draft policies compiled by the work groups are presented to a larger group of members who represent various issues and constituencies across APA and affiliated state, territorial, and provincial psychological associations. This latter group, our governing Council of Representatives, votes to adopt these resolutions and guidelines as final organizational policy. Through this multi-phase process, APA ensures that the resolutions and guidelines best serve the intended populations and reflect the best of psychological science.

APA members also implement these policies into practices consistent with their professional roles. Clinicians, as a central part of mental health systems and providers of direct care to individuals with disability identities, commonly draw on the 2011 Guidelines for Assessment of and Intervention with Persons with Disabilities to ensure that the care provided is consistent with best practices. Researchers and educators use psychological science and knowledge to promote awareness about the impact of stigma and discrimination toward people with disabilities, and the ways in which disability intersects with other minority statuses throughout the global community. Those practices are emphasized in the 2014 Resolution in Support of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ultimately, psychological research and education strengthen the implementation efforts of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

APA commends the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for its ongoing dedication to protect the mental health and human rights of people with disabilities. We would be pleased to continue to engage in this critical work, as well as to support the work of OHCHR more generally. Thank you for this opportunity to provide input based on our experiences in the U.S. to help inform international efforts. If APA can provide any further assistance, please feel free to contact me at [mvanderhilst@apa.org](mailto:mvanderhilst@apa.org).

Sincerely,



Meggin van der Hilst, AuD  
Director, Disability Issues in Psychology Portfolio