



AWARENESS

NOT ALL DISABILITIES ARE VISIBLE

The third of December 2020 is International Day of People with Disabilities (IDPWD). This day has been celebrated since 1992, when the United Nations mandated it.

The events are coordinated by IDPWD.org (a Brisbane-based NGO) and this year's theme is "not all disabilities are visible" with a focus on spreading awareness of disabilities that are not immediately apparent. According to the NGO, this includes mental illness, chronic pain and fatigue syndromes, hearing or sight impairments, diabetes, brain injuries, learning differences, neurological disorders, and cognitive dysfunctions – to name a few.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 15 per cent of the world's population experience some form of disability. That's a whopping one billion people across the globe.

IDPWD.org estimates that, of this one billion people, around half are living with a mental or neurological condition. Two-thirds of these people are unlikely to seek support or diagnosis, due to stigma, discrimination, or neglect

Despite these staggering figures and various initiatives to include the perspectives of people with disabilities in all spheres – from the top (government regulations) to the bottom (interpersonal relationships) – there is much room for improvement, according to the United Nations.

What can you do?

Challenge yourself by asking how you can become an ally to those with disabilities. Given this year's theme for IDPWD, consider focusing on "invisible" disabilities.

Examples include people with ADHD, renal failure, rheumatoid arthritis, depression, anxiety, allergies ... the list continues and includes any condition that significantly hinders the normal functioning of a person's life, according to Disabled World.

It's important to bear in mind that many people with invisible disabilities may choose to not disclose these conditions for fear of judgment. It will help if we communicate about mental health and other invisible conditions in a respectful and informed way at all times.