

## **AAMR's UNIQUE NICHE IN THE INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY WORLD**

### **AAMR Publishes the Widely Accepted Definition of *Mental Retardation***

Since 1876, the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) has led the field of developmental disabilities by officially defining the condition known as "mental retardation". A diagnostic and classification system remains important in today's society because it is used to determine who can access publicly funded services and supports.

The current AAMR definition of mental retardation was developed by an international committee of disability experts and is based on the latest research findings, contemporary practices, and a new understanding of how our modern society views the concept of disability. The 10<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Association's classification manual *Mental Retardation: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports* reflects the growing consensus in the field that mental retardation is seen as a condition that can be enhanced by providing appropriate supports, rather than being viewed as an absolute life-long trait. A critical implication of this supports-based approach to diagnosing mental retardation is the focus on the *individual* and his or her unique strengths, abilities and needs. This rapidly emerging trend is to provide individualized services and supports rather than using pre-existing diagnostic categories to place people into traditional models of service.

Today AAMR offers the only supports-based definition and classification system, making it the most progressive disability diagnostic system available for people with this significant cognitive disability.

### **AAMR Accomplishments In Our Definitional Work:**

- Publishing the 10<sup>th</sup> Edition of *Mental Retardation: Definition, Classification, and Systems of Supports*.
- Developing a companion workbook that can be used by front line workers to support people with disabilities.
- Publishing the 10th Edition in a variety of languages including English, Spanish, French, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, and Mandarin.
- Conducting special Training Institutes throughout the United States and in other countries on the AAMR definition and classification system.

### **AAMR Leads the Way In Supports**

AAMR has been a leading force in advocating for the supports paradigm — a new positive and forward-thinking approach that shifts the focus from deficits in the individual with disabilities, to one that recognizes unique personal strengths and identifies needed supports. Through the supports lens, mental retardation is viewed as a functional disability that can be enhanced or ameliorated by providing individualized, person-centered activities, strategies and resources.

AAMR first introduced the landmark concept of supports in 1992, in the 9<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Association's official definition and classification manual. The supports-based definition reflects the great strides we have made as a society in our views of persons with disabilities. Over the last decade, supports have been increasingly recognized as the new way of thinking in the field of disabilities and AAMR has been developing tools and materials to advance that emerging paradigm. AAMR has been focusing on educating others and developing the first assessment tool designed to assist professionals in determining practical support needs of persons with intellectual disabilities. A new Supports Intensity Scale (SIS) will

enable professionals to put the concept of supports into practice and will bring us a step closer to full inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities in our community settings.

### **AAMR Accomplishments In Advancing The Supports Paradigm:**

- Publishing the *Supports Intensity Scale (SIS)* in 2003; the first scientific tool to measure the level of supports required by an individual with mental retardation and related disabilities in order to live as independently as possible.
- Publishing the *Positive Behavior Support Training Curriculum*, which is uniquely tailored to teach proactive behavior strategies to the direct support workforce and to foster the progressive principles of supports and person-centered planning.
- Providing training on Positive Behavior Supports throughout the country.

### **AAMR Focuses On Physical, Emotional, Spiritual and Environmental Health**

AAMR has long recognized that the quality of life experienced by individuals with cognitive disabilities is directly related to the ability to access comprehensive, individualized, community-based health services and supports. We are a leader in promoting healthier lives for individuals with intellectual disabilities and in educating others about the preventable causes of disability, many of which are health-related. With more than 7.5 million persons with mental retardation living in communities today, there is a critical need for service systems to provide quality community health supports.

Health is now understood as the state of optimal physical, mental, emotional, social, environmental and spiritual well-being. AAMR recently introduced the Community Health Supports model to guide the field in delivering high quality, community-based, personally-directed health services and supports. The focus of the new health model is to assist individuals in managing personal limitations, performing desired activities, and participating in desired social roles within communities of their choice. Community Health Supports include environmental adaptations, technological assistance, and the provision of social, emotional and spiritual supports, in addition to medical, behavioral and therapeutic interventions.

AAMR will continue to lead the field by disseminating health-related information, developing evidence-based health promotion guidelines, and supporting health-related research, training, advocacy, and progressive public policy.

### **AAMR Accomplishments In Advancing Total Health:**

Convening a groundbreaking national summit in July 2003 to explore how environmental toxins and pollutants affect the lives of those with intellectual disabilities and to develop a National Action Plan aimed at reducing health risks associated with America's toxic legacy.

Developing a special section in the new *Supports Intensity Scale* that makes it possible for professionals to measure the impact of common health and medical needs on the supports that individuals with disabilities require to lead a life of quality.

Focusing on health at the 2004 AAMR Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, including sponsoring a special seminar on *Health Promotion for Persons with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities: The State of Scientific Evidence*.

Working with the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities in support of legislation and regulations that improve access to quality health care.