



# Healthcare Access for People with Disabilities

Access to **quality healthcare is a human right often out of reach for many of the 1.3 billion people living with disabilities** worldwide, **80% of whom live in low- and middle-income countries.**<sup>1,2</sup> Article 25 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) reinforces the right of people with disabilities to attain the highest standard of health without discrimination. However, people with disabilities are **three times more likely to be denied healthcare and four times more likely to be treated poorly by the healthcare system.**<sup>3</sup> This is largely attributable to a combination of factors, including social barriers, poverty, and physical inaccessibility.

## Social Barriers

In many cultures, disability is **associated with superstitious beliefs, such as witchcraft and curses, causing isolation, neglect, abuse, or even death.**<sup>4</sup> Therefore, people with disabilities may not seek medical support when needed. When they do go to a medical facility, they often face **inadequate care** by medical professionals who:

- Lack knowledge about disabilities
- Fail to see beyond their disability
- View them as inferior and unworthy of lifesaving care
- Neglect to communicate effectively if they have visual, hearing, motor, and/or cognitive issues

## Poverty

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), **over half of all people with disabilities in low-income countries cannot afford healthcare.**<sup>5</sup> This lack of resources hinders access to transportation, consultations, medicine, therapy, procedures, and assistive devices worldwide.

### Poverty Barriers<sup>9</sup>

- A moderate disability increases the cost of living by about 33%.
- A severe disability increases the cost of living by more than 40%
- Families/caretakers of people with disabilities are 50% more likely to deal with catastrophic healthcare spending.

## Physical Inaccessibility



In many countries, accessing healthcare and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities is limited to urban areas, if available at all. Accessibility is often hindered by transportation issues, including distance, inaccessible modes of travel, and high transportation fees. **Data from 8 low-income countries indicate that 36% of people with disabilities consider transportation inaccessible.**<sup>6</sup>

At other times, a lack of assistive devices prevents people with disabilities from accessing care. **By 2030, the WHO estimates that over 2 billion people globally will need at least one assistive product. Yet currently, only 5-15% of the assistive technology needs of people with disabilities are being met.**<sup>7</sup>

Many healthcare settings also prove difficult for people with mobility challenges to navigate due to the lack of ramp or elevator access, narrow passageways, inaccessible toilets, fixed-height furniture such as examination beds and chairs, poorly lit rooms, and a lack of clear signage. **In some countries, more than 25% of people with disabilities consider public buildings hindering or inaccessible.**<sup>8</sup>

Each of these barriers contribute to the lack of healthcare as a basic human right. When this right is denied, it affects one's ability to attend school, access a livelihood, or be an active participant in society--perpetuating further cycles of disadvantage.

# How Kupenda is Increasing Access to Healthcare

Kupenda for the Children improves healthcare access for thousands of children with disabilities by mainstreaming disability services within health and development efforts.

## Direct Service

Kupenda offers medical assistance to individuals affected by disabilities through:

- Early identification of disabilities and medical needs through trained staff and mobile app tracking
- Employment of physical therapists and medical professionals in community schools
- Construction of physical therapy facilities
- Provision of assistive devices
- Support of nutritional needs

## Individual and Family Counseling

Kupenda counsels individuals and families affected by disabilities about:

- Understanding their legal healthcare rights
- Designing health interventions at the household level
- Providing referrals to qualified medical personnel that can meet a diverse set of physical and communication needs
- Improving financial circumstances through income-generating projects

## Community Leader Trainings

Kupenda educates influential community leaders about the correct causes of disabilities, legal rights, and needs of children with disabilities. The organization then collaborates with these leaders to develop action plans to address gaps in care. This results in:

- Improved capacity of health professionals to recognize and address specific needs of children with disabilities
- Registration of hundreds of people with disabilities to receive national services
- Provision of medical referrals and emergency transportation
- Community sensitization about disability that results in the reduction of stigma and harmful practices

## Policy Reform

Kupenda advocates for policy reform and implementation by:

- Enhancing inclusive practices, accessible facilities, and available resources for people with disabilities in existing health programs
- Monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on public health programs with a specific attention to the needs and outcomes of children with disabilities

Overall, Kupenda's mitigation efforts align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for a better and more sustainable future for all. They ensure that healthcare services reach the entire population, resulting in better health, prosperity, and inclusion worldwide.

## Kelvin's Story



When Kelvin was born with hydrocephalus, his father abandoned his family due to the stigma of his son's disability. As a result, Kelvin's mother struggled to support his medical care in addition to the family's other needs.

By the time Kelvin and his mother first visited the Kupenda office in Kenya, he was in severe pain and could barely breathe. His doctor recently informed them that Kelvin's shunt was infected and there was nothing to be done.

Responding quickly, Kupenda arranged for Kelvin to access transportation and referred him to a medical professional familiar with working with people with disabilities. This doctor looked beyond Kelvin's hydrocephalus and determined that there was nothing wrong with his shunt. Instead, he was diagnosed with HIV and given critical medication.

With greater access to life-saving care, today Kelvin is thriving. His mother said, "Now Kelvin can sleep, and he can smile. I can see him growing like any other child."

**For more information:**

Visit: [www.Kupenda.org](http://www.Kupenda.org)

Contact: [kupenda@kupenda.org](mailto:kupenda@kupenda.org)

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<sup>5</sup> "Disability and Health," World Health Organization.

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<sup>9</sup> "World Report on Disability," World Health Organization, last modified 2011, <https://www.who.int/teams/noncommunicable-diseases/sensory-functions-disability-and-rehabilitation/world-report-on-disability>.