

# Easterseals Disability Services Releases Multi-Media Report Reimagining Hollywood: A New Lens on Disability Inclusion

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Irvine, CA,

Media Contact

Marketing Communications

[marcom@essc.org](mailto:marcom@essc.org)

[818-326-5372](tel:818-326-5372)

A new Easterseals Disability Services multi-media report, ***Reimagining Hollywood: A New Lens on Disability Inclusion***, provides a comprehensive understanding of how disability inclusion is currently viewed in entertainment and media. While there have been positive

steps forward, new data underscores the need for greater inclusion and authenticity in storylines and on-screen representation.

“For more than a decade, we’ve collaborated with the disability community, especially those working in entertainment, to reframe how disability is viewed by decision makers,” said Nancy Weintraub, Chief Advancement Officer, Easterseals Southern California. “This report is a follow up to our first in 2018. We wanted to understand how far we’ve come, and how we need to improve. We must continue to break down preconceived notions about disability and further evolve our workplaces.”

[Reimagining Hollywood: A News Lens on Disability Inclusion](#) provides a deep, honest understanding of the “lived” experiences from disabled creatives, outlining the challenges and unnecessary barriers they face trying to be heard and considered for work, while still pointing to bright spots and some real progress as a path forward.

For example, “CODA” is the first film with a predominantly Deaf cast to win an Academy Award for Best Picture; Ali Stroker makes history as the first actor who uses a wheelchair to win a Tony Award for Best Performance for her lead role in Oklahoma; and, the documentary “Crip Camp,” about a summer camp for disabled teenagers, is picked up by Netflix and nominated for an Oscar.

Successes behind the camera are also laying the groundwork for what needs to happen next to advance disability inclusion across entertainment. Most significant, is the emergence and adoption of production accessibility coordinators on some sets. It’s no surprise that disabled talent are championing production accessibility coordinators, but even more encouraging is the feedback from industry leaders who have interacted with this role on set. They, too, believe accessibility coordinators are valuable and should become a consistent line-item for productions.

## **Additional key insights include:**

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Talented disabled creators with growing platforms are building audiences and taking control of their own narrative; the industry, studios and networks, should take notice, recognize and value these accomplishments; and understand they are missing out on an untapped audience with real buying power potential.

Entertainment and media have the opportunity to uplift and celebrate the diversity of the disability community. When they do, they’ll not only win hearts and minds, but also grow a loyal audience, broaden viewership and increase revenue.

It’s not just about any one genre or type of media – film, TV, streaming, digital content, audio, news, social media – disability belongs everywhere. Disabled people need to have a vocal seat at the table, working at every level, from assistants to executives, and from background actors to leading roles.

“I don't just want to see a token disabled character in a movie or on television every once in a while. That's not true disability representation,” said Emily Ladau, an author and media consultant.

“Disabled people belong everywhere in the media industry—behind the scenes, informing every aspect of a media project, working at every level of a company. I want to see disabled people in the background, as supporting characters, and in leading roles. Inclusion in Hollywood needs to be a movement and not a moment.”

This multi-media report is informed by partnerships with [Variety](#), [TheWrap](#), Hollywood Radio & Television Society (HRTS) and Film Independent, to provide well-rounded perspectives from industry leadership and disabled talent. It included two listening sessions with dozens of disabled creatives to gather concrete calls-to-action Hollywood needs to take to shift the narrative about disability.

It also provides perspectives from a nationwide disabled audience. Since 2020, Easterseals has commissioned three surveys\* of American adults with disabilities about their perspectives on disability inclusion and authentic representation in media and entertainment, among other topical issues.

## Key findings include:

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**Tepid Representation:** Only 40% of adults with disabilities reported seeing a person with a disability in any television show or movie within the past three months, and 38% reported seeing such representation in advertising. This marks the lowest levels recorded in the last four years of Easterseals' surveys.

**Stagnant Portrayals:** A majority (61%) of respondents feel that portrayals of people with disabilities in media have either stagnated or become less frequent during the last five years, aligning with [findings from the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative](#), which noted a decline in characters with disabilities in top films.

**Untapped Disability Audience:** One in four Americans have a disability, representing some 70 million people. 45% of adults with disabilities are more likely to watch films or shows featuring genuine disability portrayals, and 74% are more inclined to support brands that include people with disabilities in their advertising.

Bottom line, this report reinforces the urgent need for entertainment and media industries to rewrite the script—to amplify disability inclusion is not only a moral imperative but a smart business strategy with wide-reaching benefits.

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[Easterseals Southern California](#) makes a lasting difference each day by providing essential disability and community services to children, adults, and their families. For more than 100 years, we have worked tirelessly with our partners to enhance quality of life and expand local access to healthcare, education and employment opportunities.

Easterseals Southern California provides essential services and on-the-ground supports to more than 25,000 people each year—from early childhood programs for the critical first five years, to autism services, daily and independent living services for adults, employment programs and more.

Our public education, policy and advocacy initiatives positively shape perceptions and address the urgent and evolving needs of the one in four Americans with disabilities today.

\*Pathfinder Opinion Research conducted the latest survey from October 4-9, 2024, and included a representative sample of 800 adult Americans with disabilities. The survey was conducted online, and respondents self-identified based on disability categories used by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data were weighted to reflect the demographic characteristics of the U.S. population with disabilities as reported by the 2023 American Community Survey.

## **About Easterseals Southern California**

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Easterseals Southern California transforms lives every day. For over a century, Easterseals has championed inclusion and independence—delivering essential services like early childhood programs, autism services, employment and independent living support to more than 29,000 people each year. Through advocacy and education, we break barriers and create opportunities for the one-in-four Americans with disabilities. Learn more at:

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