



Bridging Disability & Environmental Conservation

www.DisabilityOrganizing.net

A Disability Organizing (DO) Network Factsheet - Jan. 2019

Plastic straw bans will reduce environmental waste and benefit our oceans. Many Californians assume straw bans are beneficial for all, however banning plastic straws can create even more barriers for people with disabilities.

The Statewide Straw Ban

As of January 1, 2019, California banned single-use plastic straws in full service restaurants, unless the customer requests one. As the new regulation goes into effect, counties and cities across the state are seeking to pass local ordinances.

Why Straws?

Straws can be a key accommodation and a piece of assistive technology for people with disabilities, enabling individuals to drink and/or eat. Having access to straws (historically plastic straws) allows people with disabilities to access independence, community integration and public life.

Actual User Experiences

With support from Monterey Bay Aquarium (the Aquarium), Disability Organizing (DO) Network conducted the nation's first study on the Disability community's experiences with non-plastic alternative straws.

Local Disability advocates conducted user experience tests with people with disabilities from across the state and discovered that:

- People with disabilities who need straws for accessing eating and/or drinking have nuanced and diverse needs. They are always the experts on their own experiences.
- People with disabilities seek straws that are flexible, lightweight, durable for re-use and different temperatures.
- People with disabilities want to find ways to reduce waste and conserve the environment.

- Compostable paper straws DO NOT work for most people with disabilities.
- The best alternatives that DO work for people with disabilities are (1) bendable, compostable plastic straws and (2) BPA-free bendable straws— both types need to be at least 8.25 inches long.

How to Cultivate a Win-Win

We are stronger together. Californians do not have to choose between providing access to people with disabilities and reducing harm to the environment. Solutions to fit both needs can be found when we:

Partner with local environmental conservation and justice organizations:

Start a local conversation about how to partner and support each other's efforts. Use the Monterey Bay Aquarium and Disability Organizing (DO) Network's partnership on the [Alternative Straw Use Report](#) as an example of what's possible.

Partner with local policy makers:

Utilize relationships with local disability-run organizations, including your local independent living center to ensure people with disabilities are actively participating in legislative meetings and testifying at hearings. Share the message that communities do not have to sacrifice the environment to provide straw access to those who need them. For examples of legislative language, please contact the Disability Organizing (DO) Network.

Partner with local restaurant owners & workers:

Be sure to inform local restaurant owners and workers that:

- The Disability Community is a key customer base.
- Straws must be made available upon request.
- Providing signage to convey straw access is vital. Patrons may be hesitant to request a straw out of fear of discrimination or may assume that straws are not available. To get simple signage for your local restaurant, please contact the Disability Organizing (DO) Network.
- The best alternative straws for the people with disabilities are bendable, compostable, BPA-free and are at least 8.25 inches long. For more details, please visit [the Disability Organizing Network's website](#).

Want to learn more about how you and your local community can get involved?

Contact Allie Cannington, Statewide Community Organizer with the Disability Organizing (DO) Network at allie@cfilc.org and visit our website at www.disabilityorganizing.net