

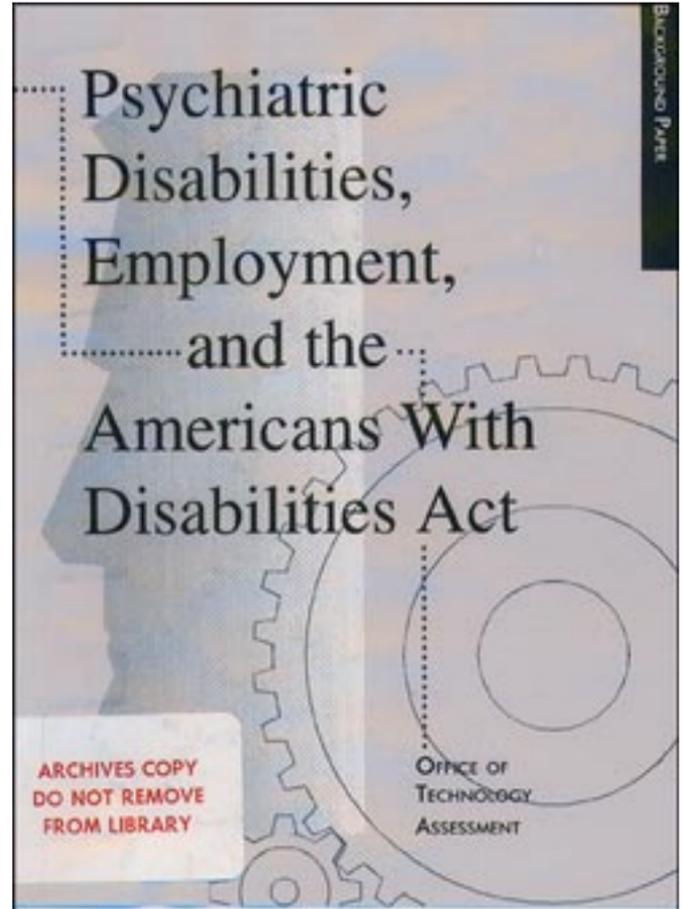
*Psychiatric Disabilities, Employment and
the Americans With Disabilities Act*

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Foreword

Few activities are as central to our lives as working. For many of us, employment occupies a large portion of our waking hours and leads to economic independence. Our jobs shape our sense of identity, self-esteem, and social connectedness. The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 makes it possible for people with disabilities to participate more fully in this key component of modern society.

Employers and people with disabilities must translate this vision of the ADA into a reality. Without question, psychiatric disabilities raise some of the most challenging issues under the ADA's employment provisions. Psychiatric disabilities are not readily apparent. People identified as having one of these conditions often are stigmatized in our society. Moreover, with their impact on behavior and social interactions, psychiatric disabilities sometimes raise difficult issues for employers and coworkers.

Ongoing Congressional interest in the ADA as well as mental health issues led Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, to request, and several members of the House Working Group on Mental Illness and Health Issues—Congressman Dave Hobson (R-Ohio), Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), Congressman Mike Kopetski (D-Oregon), Congressman Ron Machtley (R-Rhode Island), and Congressman Jim McDermott (D-Washington)—to endorse the request for this OTA background paper. In this background paper, OTA examines current knowledge about psychiatric disabilities and employment in the context of the ADA's requirements and reviews Federal activities directly or indirectly aimed at supporting the ADA's employment provisions.

Many individuals and institutions contributed their time and expertise to this project. People with psychiatric disabilities as well as experts from government, industry, and academia participated in the preparation of this background paper, serving on a workshop panel and reviewing drafts of the chapters. OTA gratefully acknowledges their contributions and assistance. As with all OTA analysis, however, responsibility for the content is OTA's alone.



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