



## CII Partner Spotlight: Cara Thanassi

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### **Q: What is your role at USAID?**

A: I am a Foreign Service Officer in the Crisis, Stabilization, and Governance backstop. I currently serve as Acting Division Chief of the Empowerment and Inclusion Division within the Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, which falls under USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance. In this role and with the support of an amazing team, I oversee the implementation of five congressional mandates – the Wheelchair Program; the Leahy War Victims Fund; the Victims of Torture Fund; the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund; and the Disability Program.

### **Q: How have you worked with USAID/CII?**

A: For some time now, we have felt strongly that USAID's Bureau for Global Health has models, approaches, and lessons learned that can and should be applied to improve access to assistive technology, such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, eyeglasses, and prosthetics. Nearly one billion people worldwide need an assistive product and up to 95 percent of those individuals do not have access. A simple, life-changing product can increase opportunities for education, employment, and participation in community life.

With CII, we supported research to identify the key barriers preventing people from accessing assistive technologies. This initial effort evolved over the past year to become ATscale, A Global Partnership for Assistive Technology. Together with the U.K.'s Department for International Development; the World Health Organization; the U.N. Children's Foundation; the Clinton Health Access Initiative; the U.N. Special Envoy for Health; the Global Disability Innovation Hub and other key partners we are developing a collaborative strategy to tackle the problem. CII has been with us every step of the way. In addition to the wealth of technical expertise and experience the CII staff bring to the table, their commitment and curiosity has made them not only an invaluable partner but also a great pleasure to work with.

### **Q: What makes you passionate about your work?**

A: The everyday heroes I encounter in the field and dedicated colleagues.

### **Q: What topic(s) in global health interest(s) you the most and why?**

A: I am really interested in how the global health sector – in collaboration with other sectors – can most effectively prepare to deal with the impact of conflict and the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, injuries, and ageing populations. This topic interests me not just because it applies to my day to day work but also because as development professionals, we should all challenge ourselves to ensure our activities, programming and policies promote true inclusion and reach populations that have been traditionally underserved.

### **Favorite Quote:**

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead