

IIDL Leadership Briefing L

The COVID-19 Pandemic and its Effect on People with a Disability

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“What is necessary to stop this temporary barrier (of COVID-19) from becoming a long-term regression is the commitment from all sections of society (governments, employers, educational institutions, healthcare providers, among others) in countries all over the world to continue prioritizing disability inclusion efforts”.¹

Introduction

An international survey by the Global Disability Rights Monitor found key areas of concern among disabled people. Australia and England have also asked people with a disability about their experiences of COVID-19. Key issues across all three reports include reduction of health and disability services, lack of access to normal daily living necessities, poverty and worries/concern about the future. Solutions for future action are presented.

International

Global Disability Rights Monitor: Disability rights during the pandemic 2020

This report has one central purpose: To raise the alarm globally as to the catastrophic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on persons with disabilities worldwide and to catalyse urgent action in the weeks and months to come.

Through the testimonies of 2,152 respondents from 134 countries, predominantly from persons with disabilities themselves, the report draws the worrying conclusion that states have overwhelmingly failed to take sufficient measures to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in their responses to the pandemic.

The survey showed that COVID-19 had a devastating effect on persons with disabilities. It also showed that states need to become more inclusive and respect the rights of persons with disabilities. Based on the survey, the report gives 11 recommendations for decision makers:

- Protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

¹International Committee of the Red Cross
<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/covid-19-and-its-impact-persons-disabilities>

- Ensure access to food, medicine and services.
- Ensure access to healthcare and treatment.
- Stop discrimination.
- End institutionalisation and fund community-based projects.
- Equal support for persons with disabilities.
- Involve persons with disabilities in decisions affecting them.
- Protect persons with disabilities in the response, and pay special attention to some groups who are more discriminated, like girls with disabilities and people that do not live in big cities.
- Make inclusive education a priority.
- Create accessible information about COVID-19 and health.
- Train staff to make them aware of disability and make sure persons with disabilities have access to justice.

<https://integratedcarefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Disability-Rights-During-the-Pandemic-report-web.pdf>

Easy read version by Inclusion Europe:

<https://integratedcarefoundation.org/ific/disability-rights-during-the-pandemic>

Aotearoa

VIDEO

“Life in a Pandemic: Lockdowns impact on disabled people”

Life Unlimited
2020

At 11.59pm on March 25, 2020, New Zealand went into Covid-19 Lockdown. It required fast action and adjustment to everybody’s lives. Life Unlimited Charitable Trust wanted to understand and tell the stories of Lockdown’s impact on disabled people and their whanau and to show the various ways they coped. Some bonded with family, some were lonely and bored, some turned to technology while others found solace in their culture and ancestral lands.

Life in a Pandemic is their story told in their own words with stunning images taken by top photographers. Published by Life Unlimited with support from the Ministry of Health, Brian Perry Charitable Trust and Fuji Xerox, Life in a Pandemic tell the stories of autistic and disabled people in Lockdown.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djrxCbLLf0o&app=desktop>

Australia

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Public Hearing Report Public hearing 5 Experiences of people with disability during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic November 2020

Many people with disability, such as those with complex needs, require personal support that puts them in close contact with other people in circumstances that make it impossible to physically distance. Often, disability support workers provide support to more than one person with disability, or also support older people, increasing the chance of workers becoming infected and passing the infection on to people they support.

In June 2020, the Royal Commission announced that it would hold a public hearing to examine the experiences of people with disability during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This hearing took place from 18 to 21 August 2020 in Sydney.

The evidence presented addressed the profound impact of the pandemic on the health, safety and wellbeing of many people with disability. Witnesses spoke of the sudden loss of support services essential to daily life; a lack of access to basic necessities such as food and medications; and uncertainty about the prospects for survival in the face of prolonged disruptions to essential care and support.

This report makes 22 wide-ranging recommendations, in light of evidence from people with disability, advocates, experts and government representatives.

<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-11/apo-nid309818.pdf>

Easy read version:

https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-11/apo-nid309818_0.pdf

UK

Office for National Statistics: Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain September 2020

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey on the social impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people in Great Britain. This release uses two waves of survey results covering 24 September to 4 October 2020 and includes indicators broken down by impairment type.

Key points included:

1. Over 8 in 10 (83%) disabled people compared with around 7 in 10 (71%) non-disabled people said they were “very worried” or “somewhat worried” about the effect that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was having on their life in September 2020; for disabled people, but not for non-disabled people, this is a

similar level to that reported earlier in the pandemic (86% and 84% respectively in April 2020).

2. Being in a local lockdown area or not did not seem to have affected the level of worry (“very worried” or “somewhat worried”) reported by disabled people in September 2020, with similar levels reported by disabled people in a local lockdown area (81%) compared with those who were not (84%).
3. Around 5 in 10 (50%) disabled people who were receiving medical care before the coronavirus pandemic began, indicated that they were either currently receiving treatment for only some of their conditions (29%), or that their treatment had been cancelled or not started (22%), compared with less than 3 in 10 (27%) of non-disabled people who had a physical or mental health condition or illness and were receiving care before the pandemic.
4. Over 4 in 10 (45%) of those disabled people who had reported receiving a reduced level of treatment or had their treatment cancelled in September 2020 reported that they felt their health had worsened in this time; in July 2020 this proportion was one-quarter (25%).
5. All well-being ratings of disabled people remained poorer in September 2020 compared with a similar period prior to the coronavirus pandemic; almost half (47%) of disabled people reported high anxiety (a score of 6 out of 10 or higher) in September 2020 compared with less than a third (29%) of non-disabled people.
6. Disabled people reported more frequently than non-disabled people in September 2020 that the coronavirus pandemic is affecting their well-being because it makes their mental health worse (41% for disabled people and 20% for non-disabled people), they are feeling lonely (45% and 32%), they spend too much time alone (40% and 29%), they feel like a burden on others (24% and 8%), or have no-one to talk to about their worries (24% and 12%).
7. Worries about the future is amongst the most frequently cited ways well-being has been affected for both disabled (68%) and non-disabled people (64%) in September 2020; however, disabled people were less optimistic about the future than non-disabled people, with 1 in 10 (11%) of disabled people thinking life will never return to normal compared with only 1 in 20 (5%) of non-disabled people.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsondisabledpeopleingreatbritain/september2020#main-points>

Scotland

Scottish Government: Impact of COVID-19 on Equality Groups: Disability analysis

October 2020

This slidepack is designed to focus on key structural inequalities and presents analysis by **disability** across a range of policy areas.

The audience for the slidepack is policy makers who require evidence to inform policies and programmes to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19.

The analysis presented highlights some areas where disabled people have different or worse outcomes than the general population.

This slide pack outlines:

- Risks
- Housing and communities
- Poverty
- Social security
- Labour market
- Children & young people
- Health & wellbeing

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/inequalities-by-disability-in-the-context-of-covid-19-slide-pack/>

Scottish Government: The Impacts of Covid-19 on Equality in Scotland June 2020

This paper reviews emerging evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on equality across several key domains: health, economic, education, safety and security, social and wellbeing, housing, digital, and environmental. With Brexit on the horizon, the paper also considers the projected impacts of Brexit on equality and how these interact with COVID-19 impacts.

Disabled people are experiencing higher death rates from COVID-19 according to data from England and Wales. Similar data is not currently available for Scotland. There is evidence that more disabled people in Great Britain are having their access to healthcare and treatment for non-coronavirus-related issues affected by COVID19, and have had new or worsening health problems, which will have long-term impacts for many.

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2020/09/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-equality-in-scotland/documents/full-report/full-report/govscot%3Adocument/Covid%2Band%2BInequalities%2BFinal%2BReport%2BFor%2BPublication%2B-%2BPDF.pdf>