

# COVID-19's Impact on People with Disabilities in Canada

## Fact Sheet No. 2:

### Accessing Essentials During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and related policy measures had many negative impacts on diverse people with disabilities in Canada. While these impacts were often profound for those in the disability community, they remained largely invisible to others. In this fact sheet, diverse people with disabilities describe in their own words how they faced barriers to accessing essentials like food, supplies, information, and technology during the crisis.

### Key impacts of COVID-19 and related policies on access to essentials:

- **Major income gaps** between people with disabilities and those without disabilities were widened by government pandemic measures. This was especially true for Indigenous people with disabilities, women with disabilities and people with lower levels of education.
- People with disabilities, especially young people, women, and those with lower levels of education, were **more likely to experience job loss** and faced greater barriers to employment than people without disabilities.
- **Everyday supplies and services cost more**, making it hard for people with disabilities to meet their needs, especially for those on low income, with children, or living alone.
- People with disabilities faced **additional barriers** because of public transit interruptions and limits to in-person shopping.
- **Government funding often left out people with disabilities** or came too late to be helpful.
- Many people with disabilities, including older adults, racialized people, Indigenous people, families and people living with low income, had **limited access to information and services** often because they could not afford or did not have access to computers or the internet.

## A widening income gap

The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns led to lower income for many people with disabilities. Even before the pandemic, people with disabilities were more likely to have a lower income than those without disabilities. This gap widened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) of \$2,000 month—nearly double what some people with disabilities receive on income assistance—was a stark reminder of the income gap that people with disabilities experience. Other emergency funding required people with disabilities to be registered for the Disability Tax Credit, which meant many were not eligible.



“Why is it considered that an able-bodied person is worth \$2,000 a month, but a person with disabilities is not? We have the same expenses. We have the same needs. . . well, actually, we have maybe more. You know, it’s, in every case we’re an afterthought.”

– Interview participant

## Fewer employment opportunities

People with disabilities were twice as likely as people without disabilities to experience temporary or permanent job loss during the pandemic, especially women, young people, those who have less education, or have more than one impairment. The pandemic further reduced job opportunities for people with disabilities as employers scaled back and shifted to online forms of work. While some people with disabilities have thrived working from home, for many other people with disabilities, working from home was not an option because of the type of position they worked in or because they did not have access to necessary accommodations or technology. Limited employment opportunities often meant more isolation and poverty.

## Barriers to accessing food and supplies

The pandemic and related measures made it more difficult for people with disabilities to get groceries. People with visual impairments said they found wayfinding in stores did not exist or was impossible to follow. Others who had to shop online had long delays in getting food and supplies. Delivery fees were expensive and higher food costs forced some people to go to the grocery store themselves, often putting their own safety at risk.

## Access to information & information technology

Many people with disabilities, especially young people and those with intellectual disabilities, reported that they got confusing and hard-to-follow information about the emergency. A great deal of information about the COVID-19 pandemic was inaccessible to people who are blind or Deaf because information was only available online or in electronic messages. Some information could not be read by screen readers or was inaccessible because sign language interpretation was not provided. Many people with disabilities also live on low income. As a result, many do not have or could not afford regular access to the internet or a computer. Without internet access, people with disabilities did not have the same access as others to information about the emergency or where to get help.

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“The pandemic made that so much worse, because people’s costs went up substantially for everything from groceries to transportation, because they were no longer able to use public transportation.”

– Interview participant

## What are some good practices that could improve access to essentials in future crises?

- Governments should extend income supports to all persons with disabilities, including those who may not be officially registered or eligible, and regardless of their work status.
- Employers must have the right technology, accommodations, and policies, so that people with disabilities can continue to work during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Access to meal and food security programs needs to be protected and expanded during the pandemic and emergencies.
- Stores need guidance documents and examples of inclusive practices for wayfinding within stores during times of social distancing.

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“The \$600 one-time payment for our community, that’s a huge challenge, because there hasn’t been any sign language translation provided to explain what this \$600 payment is. It’s only provided in English text. And sometimes that, you know, that’s a barrier in and of itself. Sometimes, if the deaf person is able to get someone to call in, they have to wait for 30 minutes. So that means that they’re not getting full access to information like the rest of the population.”

– Focus group participant

## About this series

This fact sheet is part of a series highlighting research conducted in Fall 2020 by the Live Work Well Research Centre in partnership with the DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada. Read the final report and fact sheet series on [liveworkwell.ca](https://liveworkwell.ca).

### As part of this research we:

- Gathered data from five provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Québec, and New Brunswick) and from international websites;
- Analyzed statistical data, research articles, policies, and media coverage;
- Conducted interviews and focus groups with 24 disability leader key informants, 30 people with disabilities, and three federal, provincial, and regional health key informants; and
- Identified themes from the data by applying our intersectional disability and gender analysis framework (iDGA).

### The *COVID-19's Impact on People with Disabilities in Canada* fact sheet series includes:

1. Sharing the Experiences of Diverse People with Disabilities
2. Accessing Essentials During the Pandemic
3. Involving People with Disabilities in Decision-Making
4. Barriers to Health Care and Services
5. Housing and Congregate Living
6. Learning from International Examples

## Acknowledgements

We recognize our presence and work on the territories of the Attawandaron, Mississaugas, Algonquin Anishnaabeg, Kanien'kehà:ka, and Mi'kmaq Peoples. We wish to thank the participants and key informants who gave generously of their knowledge and time. We also thank Employment and Social Development Canada for their support of this work.

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