

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

Fact Sheet No. 6:

Learning from International Examples

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. This fact sheet highlights good practices gathered from international sources as part of a research project in Fall 2020. These examples show how we can respond to the perspectives and needs of people with disabilities in future emergencies.

What we learned from international examples

- An **intersectional approach** is needed to ensure that policies recognize the different social factors that affect how diverse people with disabilities are affected by emergency measures.
- Governments have an important role to play in making sure that everyone has **access to information and information technology**, regardless of disability or income level.
- It is time to widen access to **income support** for all people with disabilities, regardless of their employment status.
- We need to **collect better data about the experiences of people with disabilities during emergencies**, including data that reflects their diversity, such as types of impairments, race, Indigenous status, sexuality, and gender. This information will help to develop more inclusive policies and response plans.

Use an intersectional approach to policy-making

An intersectional approach to policy-making recognizes that people's experiences are affected by gender, disability, race, Indigeneity, age, living situations, and other dimensions. "Universal" policies that are created without an awareness of these diverse dimensions can have harmful effects on individuals and groups. New Zealand's Ministry of Health, which has developed a COVID-19 Health and Disability System Response Plan, provides a model for accessible and inclusive emergency preparations. For example, the plan begins by recognizing that treaty principles between the Māori people of New Zealand and the Crown were integrated into the COVID-19 response.

Ensure access to information and information technology

Many people in Canada with disabilities did not receive accessible information about COVID-19. As a result, many felt excluded from COVID-19 messaging or were unable to access benefits. Using websites and emails to share information also created a barrier for many people with disabilities who do not have regular internet access. In the United States, hundreds of telecommunication companies signed the “Keep Americans Connected” pledge, which supported the uninterrupted provision of two months of free access to broadband and telephone connection.

Provide income support regardless of work status

Income support in Canada, including during the pandemic, has limited eligibility for people with disabilities. Yet people with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty and face barriers to accessing government programs. A good practice, suggested by the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is to provide income supports to all persons with disabilities, regardless of their work status or formal registration.

Collect data to learn about diverse people with disabilities

In Canada, people with disabilities have been largely invisible during the crisis in part because of a lack of representative data about their experiences of living in COVID times. The UK Office for National Statistics has done multiple rounds of data collection about people with disabilities during the crisis. Their data includes disability type and sex but does not provide information about different populations.

International organizations including the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Relief and UN Women recommend that governments collect data about gender identity, disability, and other identity factors to provide better support during emergencies. The COVID-19 Disability Rights Monitoring project also notes that data is especially needed about the situations of people with disabilities in institutional settings. In addition to factors noted above, governments should also regularly gather data about race and Indigenous status.

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 at 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

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