

COVID-19 and People with Disabilities

Roundtable Discussion – March 25th, 2020

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Objective of the Roundtable Session

1. To share expertise and experience about supporting persons with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To highlight issues for further investigation
3. Create a briefing note that highlights the key issues discussed during this session.

Method For Project

1. Desktop literature review of publicly available legislation, policies, and programs relating to emergency management and persons with disabilities (June 2019 – March 2020)
 - Federal
 - Provincial/ Territorial
 - Not-for-profit organizations
 - International organizations
2. Cybernetics was used as a framing device for analysis during the project. Cybernetic control is defined as our ability to gather information, set standards and change behaviour.
3. Survey of Federal/ Provincial/ Territorial emergency management contacts (January 2020 – March 2020)

Key Demographic Information

- According to the [2017 Canadian Survey on Disability](#) (CSD)...
 - Approximately 1 in 5 Canadians over the age of 15 have at least one disability (representing 22% of Canadians).
 - Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island have the highest proportions of persons with disabilities.
 - The CSD did not included data from persons living in institutions, Canadian Armed Force bases, and First Nations reserves

Key Demographic Information (Continued)

- According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD)...
 - Seniors, or persons aged 65 and older, are nearly twice as likely to have a disability than those aged 25 to 64
 - The highest rates of poverty for persons aged 15-64 were among those reporting severe disabilities and living alone, or a lone-parent.
- According to the Assembly for First Nations 2017 [report on engagement with Federal Accessibility Legislation](#)...
 - First Nations peoples are nearly twice as likely to have a disability when compared to non-Indigenous Canadians.

Key issues for persons with disabilities during past emergencies and pandemics

- We have learned from SARS, H1N1, and other emergencies to improve emergency services for persons with disabilities.
- Key considerations include:
 - Access to assistive devices
 - Access to medications
 - Accessible communications and information
 - Accessibility of services and facilities
 - Disruptions to care and personal assistance
 - Increased stigma and marginalization
 - Service/Guide animals

International frameworks and standards to support persons with disabilities during emergencies

- [Sendai Framework](#)
 - DRR necessitates “all-of-society engagement” and requires inclusive and accessible participation. Founded in being “people-centered” and inclusive. Priority 4 states that women and persons with disabilities should publicly lead “gender-equitable and universally accessible approaches” during emergency responses.
- [Dhaka Declaration](#) (2015 & 2018)
 - The Dhaka Declaration calls for promoting empowerment by supporting inclusive community-based risk management initiatives, risk analyses, and data collection to inform early warning systems and disaster preparedness plans at all levels. It also calls for the removal of cultural, economic, social, physical, communication, and behavioural barriers

Key International, National, Provincial Accessibility Legislation to Consider

- International
 - [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(UNCRPD\)](#)
 - Article 11 the UNCRPD call on signatories to address vulnerabilities, discrimination, marginalization, and inequality in disaster risk management at all levels of government.
- National
 - [Accessible Canada Act](#)
 - Priority areas include: Transportation; Communications; Shelters/ Built environment; Medications, programs, and services; and Information and Communication Technology

Key International, National, Provincial Accessibility Legislation to Consider (Continued)

- National level continued
 - [*Charter of Rights and Freedoms*](#)
 - [*Canadian Human Rights Act*](#)
- Provincial
 - Nova Scotia's [*Accessibility Act*](#)
 - Aims to achieve accessibility in the following areas by 2030: Delivery and receipt of goods and services; information and communication; public transportation and transportation infrastructure; employment; the built environment; education; and a prescribed activity or undertaking;
 - Nova Scotia's [*Human Rights Act*](#)

Findings of recent research on emergency Management and services relating to persons with disabilities – Information Gathering

- Findings related to Information gathering:
 - Generally collected by departments offering social and/or health services – not centralized but can be shared between departments.
 - Community/ local level is often prioritized by emergency management organizations.
 - [MedicAlert Connect Protect](#) – a service used in Prince Edward Island and in Newfoundland, as well over 30 Canadian jurisdictions (including provincial police and police services in Canadian cities).
 - Statistics Canada is continuing to map vulnerable areas using statistical data and vulnerability indexes.

Findings of Recent Research on Emergency Management and Services Relating to Persons with Disabilities – Setting Standards

- Findings related to Setting Standards
 - Many jurisdictions have mechanisms to develop accessibility standards in collaboration with Government agencies (e.g., Disability issues offices, Departments designated to serve persons with disabilities, or a Disability Council or Accessibility Directorate)
 - Many provinces have provincial accessibility legislation in addition to the national legislation. Some standards therein apply to private and non-for-profit organizations.
 - The [Nova Scotia Accessibility Act](#) established the Accessibility Directorate and also provides for involving of persons with disabilities to develop accessibility standards.

Findings of Recent Research on Emergency Management and Services Relating to Persons with Disabilities – Behaviour Modification

- Findings related to Behaviour modification
 - Generally takes the form of training and awareness initiatives (e.g., to reduce stigma)
 - Changing the way we include needs for persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction (e.g., shifting from an impairment focus to functional needs and person-centred approaches)
 - The importance of changing attitudes towards person with disabilities is frequently cited area of action recommended by not-for-profit organizations supporting persons with disabilities (e.g., [Humanity & Inclusion - Handicap International](#))

Concluding Remarks

- It is evident that this field is rapidly growing nationally and internationally
 - Implementation of legislation (Federally and Provincially), particularly over the last 5-10 years
 - Many jurisdictions have created guides and resources
 - Implementation of International Frameworks (e.g., the Sendai Framework)
- Information gathering and standard setting efforts have increased in recent years. Challenges can arise with coordination and information-sharing.
- Behaviour change and reducing stigma are key areas to address

Questions and Comments

Any questions or comments?

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