



# FACT SHEET: INFORMATION FOR DISABILITY SUPPORT PROVIDERS AND WORKERS

22 May 2020

## SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY TO ACCESS HEALTH CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This fact sheet is for disability support providers and workers providing health care to people with intellectual or developmental disability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Are people with intellectual or developmental disability at greater risk of COVID-19?

Some people with intellectual or developmental disability may:

- be at greater risk of serious illness due to COVID-19 if they have [certain medical conditions and co-morbidities](#)
- have difficulty understanding and adhering to social distancing, handwashing and other risk reduction strategies. This may increase their risk of acquiring COVID-19
- not show or be able to communicate early COVID-19 symptoms because of their disability or medical treatments. For example, cough and fever may not present as early signs of COVID-19, or the person may have difficulty communicating symptoms such as a sore throat.

## What role can disability support providers and workers play?

Disability support providers and workers are essential to the health and wellbeing of many people with intellectual or developmental disability. During the COVID-19 pandemic, disability support providers and workers should:

- assist the person to use preventative measures, such as physical distancing and good hygiene
- assist the person to access testing and treatment if any symptoms develop
- support the person to understand and make decisions based on advice from the Australian and state and territory governments
- support the person to access their usual health care, including their GP and any specialists
- support the person to maintain physical and mental health and wellbeing (e.g. through exercise, activities and reducing loneliness).

## What actions should disability support providers and workers take?

Disability support providers and workers should take steps to ensure they have the resources needed to support the person during the pandemic.

- Provide information about COVID-19 to the person with disability in a way that is accessible and the person can understand
- Ensure that the person's health care plans are up to date and available in the person's medical records. This should include:
  - information about their communication needs
  - names and contact details of those involved in their health care. This should include primary care providers, specialists and those involved in health care decisions (including details of next of kin)
  - a complete medical history, including information about their disability, pre-existing health issues (especially respiratory and heart conditions) and current medications
  - a current [advanced care directive or plan](#) if appropriate
  - the person's mental health and/or Positive Behaviour Support plan, if they have one
- Assist the person to keep their vaccinations for influenza and pneumonia up to date
- Have a plan for alternative support for the person with disability. This will be needed if you or other carers develop COVID-19 symptoms and are unable to provide your usual support
- Ensure you are aware of the [latest government advice](#) about COVID-19.

- Familiarise yourself with infection control procedures and comply with measures to lower risks of acquiring and transmitting COVID-19. [COVID-19 infection control training](#) is available on the Australian Government Department of Health's website
- Ensure you know when and how to access help for everyday health issues, as well as COVID-19 symptoms
- Disability providers should keep up to date and comply with all relevant provider responsibilities related to the pandemic. NDIS providers should refer to information provided by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

## How can disability support providers and workers support access to health care?

- Do not postpone health care. Continue treatments for chronic health conditions and seek treatment for other health concerns. In the event of an emergency, follow usual protocols and seek emergency medical care
- Make sure the person's health care plan is available to health care providers. Upload details to My Health Record where possible
- Talk to usual health care providers about how and when they are offering services (e.g. home visits, telehealth or face to face consultations)
- Monitor the person's mental wellbeing and behaviour for impacts of the pandemic
- Support adults with intellectual or developmental disability to make their own medical decisions to the greatest extent possible. If the person is unable to consent, follow substitute consent laws.

**Note:** It is NOT considered an NDIS Commission regulated restrictive practice to:

- isolate an NDIS participant based on medical advice that is consistent with Australian and state / territory government requirements and/or
- prevent that person from attending public gatherings that are currently limited.

This does not limit a person's right to access disability-related supports. See the [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission guidance](#) on this matter.

## What if a disability worker or the person with disability develops symptoms of COVID-19?

- If you suspect the person with disability may have COVID-19:
  - help them or their carer to call their doctor or the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080 or call on their behalf
  - seek advice on testing, treatment and how to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to other people

- Disability workers must not attend work if they have a fever or symptoms of a respiratory illness. If you think you may have COVID-19, stay home and contact your doctor or call the National Coronavirus Helpline on 1800 020 080.

## Where can I get more information?

For the latest health advice, information and resources on the COVID-19 pandemic, go to [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au). For additional information specific to people with disability during the COVID-19 pandemic, go to <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-disability>.

The [Disability Information Helpline](http://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-disability) on 1800 643 787 can provide information and assistance related to COVID-19. The Helpline is available Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm (AEST) and Saturday to Sunday 9am to 7pm (AEST). It is not available on national public holidays.

An [Intellectual and Developmental Disability Health Working Group](#) convened by 3DN, UNSW Sydney prepared this fact sheet.