

A Letter to the Prime Minister and all the Premiers

People with disability are some of the most vulnerable people in Australia when it comes to Coronavirus (COVID19). We want to make sure they have everything they need to keep themselves safe and well.

We are organisations representing people with disability and their families. We are talking to people all the time and hearing about the problems they are having during this emergency. So, we have come up with a list of 10 actions that your governments should take to help people with disability through this crisis. **These things are urgent – you cannot afford to wait.**

Because if you don't do these things, lives will be lost.

1. Make sure people have the support they need

Many people with disability rely on support for their essential everyday needs, like eating and drinking. Others need support to keep themselves safe and mentally well. Some service providers have already stopped providing services. This puts people's lives in danger. State and Federal governments cannot let that happen – they must give people a guarantee that will get the support they need when they need it. And for people with an NDIS plan, they need to be able to spend their funds in the way that works best for them in this emergency. The NDIS must be more flexible.

2. Make sure people with disability and their workers can get tested for Coronavirus

Many people with disability have workers coming in and out their homes to help and support them. They cannot isolate or protect themselves like most other people. So, the Health Department needs to make sure that people have access to all the protective equipment and gear they need to try and prevent infection. And support workers and people with disability need to be given priority to get tested for the virus so we don't have people infecting each other.

3. Make sure people with disability and their families have all the information they need to keep themselves safe and well

At this incredibly stressful and worrying time, people with disability and their families need simple, clear information so they know what to do and how to protect themselves. They also need to make sure they follow all State and Federal Government rules – because if they don't they might be fined. People are really confused at the moment – for example if only two people are allowed to be together out of the house what does that mean for people who need two people to help them?

All information needs to make the rules clear for people who rely on support workers and families for support. And all governments need to provide information in lots of different ways, so no one misses out – we need information in Plain English, Auslan, Easy Read and translated into different languages (including First languages). And the websites and apps that have this all information must be accessible to everyone (including people who don't have the internet).

4. Make sure people with disability can get the health care they need when they need it

In other countries we have already seen that people with disability are not getting health care in the same way as others. To put it plainly – people with disability are being left to die. We cannot allow this to happen in Australia. The Health Department needs to make clear to all hospitals, health care services, doctors, nurses and workers that they must treat people with disability the same way they treat others.

Making sure people with disability can look after their health also includes making sure they can get essential supplies easily – things like fresh food, cleaning supplies, continence aids etc. In regional and remote areas this is already difficult and will get even harder.

5. People who are on the Disability Support Pension should receive extra funds just like people on government payments

Almost 50 per cent of Australians with disability already live in poverty. And now there are lots of additional costs to try and manage the impact of the virus – prices of goods have gone up and people are having to buy things they did not have to buy before - like cleaning products, extra data for their phones, devices to do things online. So, people with disability need the additional Coronavirus supplement given to others so they can keep themselves safe and well.

6. Make sure people understand what is an “essential service”

The information about what is considered “essential” during this crisis has been really confusing. Our organisations have received so many questions about what people are allowed and not allowed to do. All governments need to explain clearly and simply what an essential service is and make it clear what individuals, families and workers can and can’t do.

7. Make sure people are safe and not vulnerable to violence, abuse or exploitation

We know rates of violence and abuse are already very high for people with disability. But with everyone staying in their homes during this crisis, this is likely to get even worse. And many people with disability will be even more dependent than usual on help from others. No one will be checking to make sure they are ok. People who live with others in shared accommodation are particularly at risk. So, we need governments to come up with a plan to reach out and check on people and provide them with help and support if they need it.

8. Make sure students with disability have what they need to get a good education like everyone else

We know that many students with disability already have trouble getting a good education. And now with everything moving to learning online, this is likely to get much worse. We need all Departments of Education to come up with a plan to make sure students with disability are still supported and able to learn during this crisis. Otherwise they will fall even further behind.

9. Protect the human rights of people with disability

People with disability who live in shared accommodation are particularly at risk at the moment. We are already hearing stories about people being locked up without their permission. We are also hearing that information about what is happening is not getting to them. So, we need the government to come up with a plan to make sure people’s rights are protected, that they have the information they need, they can still make choices about how to keep themselves safe and well and so they are safe from abuse.

10. Make sure the organisations that support and help people with disability have enough funds to do their important work

Because of this emergency, all of our organisations have had more people than ever before contact us asking for help. We are independent organisations that people know and trust – and so they naturally come to us first. We are also the organisations that governments come to for advice because we know what is really happening to people with disability and their families. So, we need more funding to keep helping people – and to keep giving good advice to governments so they focus on what is important.

This letter is from the organisations listed on the following page:

First Peoples Disability Network
Women with Disabilities Australia
People with Disability Australia
National Ethnic Disability Alliance
Children and Young People with Disability
Australia
Australian Federation of Disability Organisations
Disability Advocacy Network Australia
Deaf Australia
Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia
Deafblind Australia
Deafness Forum of Australia
Brain Injury Australia
Inclusion Australia
Blind Citizens Australia
Down Syndrome Australia
Physical Disability Australia
Every Australian Counts
Disability Resources Centre Advocacy
Ideas
Disability Justice Australia
Enhanced Lifestyles
National Mental Health Consumer and Carer
Forum
Imagine More
Advocacy Western Australia
Midland Information Debt and Legal Advocacy
Service
Melbourne East Disability Advocacy
Queensland Advocacy Incorporated
Family Advocacy
Grampians Disability Advocacy
Syndromes Without A Name
Advocacy Tasmania
Southwest Advocacy Association
Victorian Rural Advocacy Network
Assert 4 All
Colac Otway Region Advocacy Service
Disability Information and Advocacy Service
Gippsland Disability Advocacy

Community Resource Unit
AED Legal Centre
ANTaR
Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and
Health
People with Disabilities Western Australia
Association for Children with Disability Tasmania
Association for Children with a Disability Victoria
All Means All
Queensland Collective for Inclusive Education
Southern Disability Advocacy
Rights Information and Advocacy Centre
Regional Disability Advocacy Service
Youth Disability Advocacy Service
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Legal Services
Spinal Cord Injuries Australia
Barwon Disability Resource Council
North East Citizen Advocacy
Julia Farr Youth
Leadership Plus
VALID
Women with Disabilities Victoria
Citizens Advocacy Perth West
Speakout Advocacy
Developmental Disability WA
Women with Disabilities ACT
Council for Intellectual Disability
Citizen Advocacy Sunbury
South Australian Council on Intellectual Disability
Parent to Parent Queensland
People with Disabilities ACT
Aspergers Victoria
Disability Advocacy and Complaints Service of
South Australia
Australian Centre for Disability Law
Disability Advocacy Victoria