

# How is life going for the disability community? (Second Survey)

**15 May 2020**

This report provides an overview of some of the key findings from the second online survey on *How life is going for the disability community?* The survey was open from 28 April to 6 May 2020. The purpose of this survey is to understand the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic being experienced by disabled people and their family/whānau. The survey also collects information from service providers and others in the disability sector (eg community advocates).

Questions in the second survey cover a wide range of topics. Topics analysed in this report are:

* biggest issues facing the disability community
* information access and understanding
* access to personal protective equipment
* access to food and other essentials
* wellbeing: safety and loneliness.

These topics were selected based on their importance for the wellbeing of disabled people and their family/whānau in the COVID-19 environment.

659 responses were received, with 158 (24%) completed surveys (ie every question answered). This 24% response rate constitutes a significant drop when compared with the 767 completed surveys out of 1,564 responses for the previous survey (49%). Various reasons can be put forward for the lower response rate such as the length of the survey leading to greater respondent fatigue completing the survey a second time.

Of the 158 respondents who completed the entire survey, 127 (80%) were disabled people and 17 (10.8%) were service providers. And of those 158 respondents, 59 and 99 completed the Easy Read (EV) and standard versions (SV) of the survey respectively. The 37% of respondents completing the EV version points to the importance of information and communications being accessible in alternate formats for disabled people.

As in the case of the first survey, there was significant variation in the number of survey questions answered by each respondent. Respondent fatigue could also be a factor here.

It is also important to bear in mind the probable bias inherent in the online survey, given that there are disabled people who do not have access to digital technology.

## The big issues facing the disability community

At the end of the first and second survey we asked respondents to tell us the three biggest issues people in the disability community were facing and three potential responses.

Overwhelmingly, the predominant issues highlighted in the EV survey included: financial and funding concerns, reduced support provision, loss of freedom and independence, access to medical services and other accessibility concerns around transport and shopping, anxiety, mental health issues and fear, and family pressure and strain due to lack of respite. Respondents felt like they were often not being listened to and wanted more support, including increased social connections and support to access essential items.

Key issues raised in the SV survey were similar to the EV survey and included: loneliness/isolation, lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), ability to access essential items, stigma and poverty. Comments noted the extra stress disabled people were experiencing, the increased loneliness, some noted reduced services and missing their communities. When asked what could improve their situations, technology was a common response alongside more support workers, greater priority given to disabled people, employment opportunities and increased community support.

Service providers’ views on the biggest issues facing the disability community were: isolation, reduced access to essential services, lack of support for caregivers and mental health. They saw these issues creating a loss of independence, a decline in mental and physical health as well as experiencing more challenging behaviours. Respondents’ view on improving the situation included:

* increased connection with family and communities
* mentoring services for parents and children
* working with essential service providers to increase access to transport, groceries etc.

## Information

### Access to information about COVID-19

**Key findings:**

* 39% of EV and SV respondents stated that it was “very easy” to find information about COVID-19, a significant drop compared to the equivalent 48.7% in the first survey.
* The majority of service provider respondents agreed that the disabled people they support can access reliable information about COVID-19.

A total of 258 respondents in both the SV and EV surveys answered the question about the ease of finding and accessing information about COVID-19. Of these respondents, 39% stated that it was “very easy” to find information. This is a significant drop compared to the first survey’s results, where 48.7% of SV and EV respondents said they found it “very easy” to find information.

There was a marked drop in the weighted average of responses between the first and second survey. In the first survey, the weighted average was 4.2, indicating that respondents found it rather easy to find information on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy. In contrast, the weighted average for the second survey was 3.5. While this is still in the “okay” range, it is worth noting the drop.

The overwhelming majority of the service provider respondents agreed that the disabled people they support can access reliable information about COVID-19

Some of the explanatory comments around access to information included: lack of access to the internet and/or technology, needing help to use technology, memory and reading issues, the quality of the information accessed, and variance in the accessibility of different types of information.

### Understanding information about COVID-19

**Key findings:**

* Only 14% of EV respondents found information about COVID-19 “very easy” to understand, a drop of around 5% since the first survey.
* The responses of SV respondents were more skewed to understanding the COVID-19 information “very well”.
* Over 40% of service provider respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that their disabled clients could understand COVID-19 information, a marked change from the first survey where there was agreement/strong agreement.

As to government information about COVID-19 being understandable, 42.7% of the EV respondents answered that they “find it okay”. Only 14% of the EV respondents said that they found the information “very easy” to understand, a drop of around 5% since the first survey (see Graph 1). This suggests that more work is needed to ensure clarity for those who require information in Easy Read format. In contrast, the responses of the SV survey participants were more skewed to understanding the information “very well” (see Graph 2).

Consistent with the response to the question about accessing information, there was a drop in the weighted average answer about understanding information relating to COVID-19 in the second survey. The weighted average in the first survey was 4.1, where 5 is very easy to understand and 1 is very hard. In the second survey, the weighted average dropped to 3.7. This is still above average but a cause for concern.

Similar to the EV responses to understanding the Government’s information about COVID-19, service providers demonstrated a bell curve pattern, with most of the respondents (41.46%) neither agreeing nor disagreeing that their disabled clients could understand the information (see Graph 3). This is a marked change from the first survey where most service providers agreed/strongly agreed that their clients could understand COVID-19 information.

Some of the comments made by disabled people and family/whānau about understanding information included: a lack of information around service provision, funding and service changes, and information being too wordy and contradictory, leading to confusion.

## Access to personal protection equipment

**Key findings:**

* 34% of EV respondents said it was either hard for them to get PPE or they could not get it at all, similar to the first survey’s findings.
* 34% of SV respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to PPE, a drop from 44% since the first survey.
* 27% of service provider respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed they had access to PPE to keep themselves and others safe, a drop from 36% since the first survey.

The survey asked service providers and disabled people whether they were able to access the equipment they need to keep themselves safe. As with the first survey, this question had one of the higher response rates. 158 people responded to the SV survey, of whom 36% agreed or strongly agreed that they had access to the equipment they needed to keep themselves safe (see Graph 4). 34% of the SV survey respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to PPE. This is down from the first survey where 44% of SV respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to PPE to keep them safe.

94 people responded to this question in the EV survey. 37% of respondents said they could access PPE, 26% said they could access some of the PPE they needed, and 34% said it was either hard for them to get PPE or they could not get PPE at all. This is similar to the first survey where 55 respondents out of 150 (37%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to PPE.

There were 40 service provider respondents who answered this question. 27% of whom disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to the equipment they needed to keep themselves and others safe. This is a reduction from the first survey results where 36% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had access to PPE.

A common issue in respondents’ comments, across all survey versions, was a lack of PPE stock. Other frequent comments noted delay in deliveries as a reason for not being able to get the PPE they needed (this was not mentioned in the comments from the first survey) and others noted they did not need PPE.

## Access to food and other essentials

**Key findings:**

* 75% and 74% of EV and SV respondents respectively reported that they could safely get all or most of the food and other essentials they needed, compared to 68% of both sets of respondents in the first survey.
* 73% of service provider respondents agreed or strongly agreed that food and other essential supplies were accessible to the disabled people they worked with.

We asked about the ability of disabled people to access food and other essentials they need. Of the 93 EV survey respondents who answered this question, 75% said they could safely get all or most of the food and other essentials they needed. 16% said they could get some of the food they need and 9% found it hard to or could not get the food and other essentials they needed (see Graph 5).

152 people responded to this question in the SV survey. 76% agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to safely get food and other essentials. With 13% (20 respondents) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they were able to get food and other essentials that they needed.

Both the EV and SV survey responses for the second survey saw an improvement on those who felt they could access all or most of the food and other essentials required. The first survey found 68% of both the EV survey and the SV survey respondents agreed, or strongly agreed, that they could safely get food and other things they needed.

Of the 40 service provider respondents, 73% agreed or strongly agreed that food and other essential supplies were accessible to the disabled people they worked with. 8% of service provider respondents disagreed that the disabled people they worked with were able to access food and other essential items. No service provider respondents strongly disagreed (see Graph 6).

The overall theme of the comments from EV and SV survey respondents was that family members or support staff were able to get food and essential items for them. There was also mention of community support groups and churches dropping off food. Comments from service providers discussed challenges disabled people they cared for were facing. This included that “there are still families out there who do not have access to other essential supplies hence needing our advocacy”, and “due to low incomes and the exploitation by supermarkets with high prices not everyone can afford and not able to collect”.

## Wellbeing: Safety and loneliness

**Key findings:**

* 60% and 58% of SV and EV respondents respectively felt “very safe”, whereas only 24% of service providers considered their disabled clients to have this level of safety.
* 31% of SV respondents reported that they were “doing mostly well”. Just over 25% of EV respondents felt this way, a marked drop from the almost 50% in the first survey.
* Contrary to the views of both SV and EV respondents, 51% of the service providers reported that their disabled clients were “mostly doing well”.
* Close to 32% and 26% of SV and EV respondents said that their family/whānau was “okay”, not very different from the first survey’s findings (ie 30%).
* There was no significant change in the number of SV (23%) and EV (24%) respondents feeling “lonely some of the time” in the second survey.

Of the 161 SV disabled respondents who completed the home safety question, close to 23% felt “mostly safe”, whilst 60% felt “very safe” (See Graph 7). 24% and 58% of the 100 EV respondents stated that they were “mostly safe” and “very safe” respectively. Close to 44% and 24% of the 41 service providers reported that the disabled people for whom they provide services were “mostly safe” and “very safe” respectively.

The number of respondents reporting to be “mostly safe” was similar to the first survey. It is interesting to note, however, that the surveyed disabled people in this second survey felt much more positive about being “very safe” compared to the service providers (See Graph 8).

The principal concerns expressed by disabled respondents for the way they felt about safety included: lack of PPE availability, past trauma, including physical and/or sexual violence, and unsafe housing/living.

When respondents were asked how well they are doing right now, 31% of the 147 SV respondents said that they were “doing mostly well”. The equivalent figure was 25.5% for the 86 EV respondents (See Graph 9). Interestingly, 51% of the 37 surveyed service providers believed that their clients were “doing mostly well”. Of note also is that there was a marked drop in the number of EV respondents reporting “mostly doing well” during the second survey.

Substantive comments provided for the quality of individual wellbeing included: missing family, increased mental health issues, and financial stress.

Regarding the question of how your family/whānau are doing at the moment, close to 32% and 26% of the 138 SV and 84 EV respondents respectively indicated that their family/whānau was “okay”.

Concerns impacting on the wellbeing of disabled respondents’ family/whānau include: work and/or financial pressures, difficulties with behaviour management, isolation and increased anxiety.

As to the question of whether you felt lonely during Alert Level 4, 23% of the 147 SV respondents felt “lonely some of the time”, compared to almost 24% of the 88 EV respondents. There is no significant change on experiencing loneliness some of the time from the first survey. It is encouraging to find in this second survey that almost 30% and 36% of the SVs and EVs respectively have “not felt lonely at all” (see Graphs 10 and 11).

Substantive reasons for loneliness mentioned included living alone and missing family, friends and co-workers.

## Appendix 1: How is life going for the disability community?

### Second Survey Graphs

Graph 1



Graph 1: EV survey on ability to understand government information on COVID-19

Graph 2



Graph 2: SV survey on ability to understand government information on COVID-19

Graph 3



Graph 3: Service providers’ view on whether the people they support can understand the Government's information on COVID-19

Graph 4



Graph 4: SV survey on access to PPE

Graph 5



Graph 5: EV survey on disabled people’s ability to safely get food and other essentials

Graph 6



Graph 6: Service providers’ view on whether food and other essential items are accessible to disabled people

Graph 7



Graph 7: SV survey on how safe respondents feel in their home right now

Graph 8



Graph 8: Service providers’ view on the safety of disabled people’s living situation

Graph 9



Graph 9: EV survey on how respondents are doing right now

Graph 10



Graph 10: EV survey on respondents’ loneliness

Graph 11



Graph 11: SV survey on respondents’ loneliness