

Ensuring a Disability-inclusive Response to COVID-19¹

RI's Commission on Technology and Accessibility

Since the global outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, Rehabilitation International (RI) and its members, especially RI commissions, have been following closely on how the pandemic is affecting lives of persons with disabilities around the world.

Our overwhelming priority is to safeguard the wellbeing of our members, their families and the wider communities in which we operate and serve.

As the COVID-19 continues to impact the health of citizens around the globe and create extreme market volatility, we are aware that each day is bringing significant challenges and pressures to the members of our global family.

Social and economic disruptions are impacting communities and families in all corners of the globe while disproportionately impacting the disability community as one of the most vulnerable groups worldwide.

Being one of the largest and oldest global networks focusing on advancing the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities, at a challenging time like this, we are called upon to be vocal leaders, and advocate strongly for the rights and needs of persons with disabilities. During the uncertain and unprecedented time, we should remain steadfast in pursuit of our mission to assist and support the disability community that we jointly serve.

RI's Commission on Technology and Accessibility (ICTA) Basic Recommendations for Persons with Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic include:

- Always provide information in accessible formats so everybody can understand them.
- Children with disabilities should receive information according to their age.
- Preparedness and response plans, including public restrictions, must be inclusive of and accessible to women and girls with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities staying at home during quarantine face a higher risk of mental health issues, therefore, governments and other private or social agencies should consider providing adequate measures for stress and anxiety relief.
- Persons with disabilities in need of health services due to COVID-19 cannot be deprioritized on the ground of their disabilities.

¹ Protecting Life Against COVID-19, Rehabilitation International, May 2020, <http://www.ri-global.org/covid-19-disability-resources/>

- Measures to lessen the impact on the economy of persons with disabilities, their families and their organizations, should be considered, including:
 - Programs for funding civil society organizations to support their employers keeping to jobs.
 - Assistance for self-employed persons with disabilities.
 - Cash delivery mechanisms should be accessible for persons with disabilities.
 - Mobile phones with accessibility features and e-wallets must be promoted to reduce interaction and keep social distancing.
- Deafblind persons rely on physical interaction with others to communicate, therefore special measures are needed during the pandemic, or even afterwards. Some examples are:
 - It's necessary to adopt an extra precaution approach to infection control, along with limiting interactions if possible.
 - Sanitizing between interactions with different individuals who are deaf-blind.
 - Interpreters also need to take strict sanitizing measures before and after interacting with them.
 - Promote development of innovative technological solutions for communication with deaf/blind persons, besides relaying on touch-based techniques.