

New Horizons

Housing That Supports Independence

Trump Administration Says Disability No Reason To Deny COVID-19 Care

Reprinted from March 30, 2020 Disability Scoop by Shaun Heasley

The Trump administration is warning states and health care providers not to discriminate against people with disabilities as coronavirus spreads.

In a bulletin issued Saturday, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office for Civil Rights said that the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and other laws prohibiting discrimination in federally-funded health programs remain in effect.

"As such, persons with disabilities should not be denied medical care on the basis of stereotypes, assessments of quality of life, or judgments about a person's relative 'worth' based on the presence or absence of disabilities," reads the bulletin. "Decisions by covered entities concerning whether an individual is a candidate for treatment should be based on an individualized assessment of the patient based on the best available objective medical evidence."

The six-page guidance document comes amid worries about how people with disabilities will fare as hospitals become overwhelmed by COVID-19 patients and may be forced to ration care.

Already, disability advocates lodged complaints with the HHS Office for Civil Rights last week about coronavirus response plans in Washington state, Alabama, Kansas and Tennessee that they claim would jeopardize people with disabilities. And, a group of 27 members of the House of Representatives and five senators wrote to Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar and Attorney General William Barr urging them to clarify to states that "existing disability nondiscrimination laws are not waiveable during the outbreak."

The civil rights office said that existing laws and regulations bar discrimination based on race, color, national origin, disability, age and sex as well as exercise of conscience and religion, but in the current pandemic the office is "particularly focused" on ensuring that people with disabilities aren't discriminated against.

"Our civil rights laws protect the equal dignity of every human life from ruthless utilitarianism," said Roger Severino, director of the HHS Office for Civil Rights. "Persons with disabilities, with limited English skills and older persons should not be put at the end of the line for health care during emergencies."



A nurse wearing a mask and gloves for protection from the coronavirus. Federal officials say that people with disabilities are entitled to the same level of care during the pandemic as everyone else. (Curtis Compton/Atlanta Journal-Constitution/TNS)



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“My Two Cents”

By *Tim Doherty, Executive Director*



What a difference a day makes. Seems like we had just celebrated Christmas and New Year's and then the world fell apart. This virus, known as the Coronavirus, which started in China, has now made it's way to the US and to our neighborhoods, and now suddenly, it has changed our whole way of life. No more shaking hands, going out to dinner or gathering in large crowds—and for some of us, no work. So as we make our way through this, a few things come to mind.

First of all, this is not the first time, we as a nation have had to deal with some kind of virus. Remember SARS, and H1N1? These also affected thousands of people, some of whom died. The common Flu also affects many, some of who die each year. Not good, and I am not minimizing the impact on people and families—we all suffer at the loss of one person or family member or friend.

But people do die each year for a number of reasons, in car accidents, work related injuries, injuries at home, in sports and because of other life threatening conditions. Life does have risks for all of us, yet for most of us, we do survive. And we will survive this time as well.

The key in this case is to follow our medical professionals and do what our leaders are advising:

1. Stay at home, limit your interactions with others so as not to get the infection or spread it.
2. Stay 6 feet away from anyone, and practice “social distancing”.
3. Wash your hands, over and over, which is the best defense against this virus.

If you feel you have the symptoms, fever, cough, difficulty breathing call your doctor. Don't automatically go to the Emergency Ward at the hospital since they won't take you unless you have been cleared by your doctor. Our emergency folks and hospitals are already over burdened, so we need to understand that, and not make unnecessary work for them.

It's also a good idea to touch base with family and friends to see how they are doing and to let them know how YOU are doing. If you are stuck at home, be creative in passing the time away.

Are there any closets that need to be organized? Any sock drawers to sort through, or any unfinished projects, that need to be done, like cleaning the fish tank-yuk. It would seem to me that with the internet, and all that it contains, it could keep someone busy for many days or weeks.

I know that some entire families are at home, home schooling kids, working from home, and otherwise “confined to quarters”. Just remember, this won't last forever, and maybe it will provide you an opportunity to do something creative, start a new hobby, or discover a new friend.

Just remember, there is always hope. American's are fundamentally good people-- we care for one another and we help when we can. No one was left behind in the past, and no one will be left behind in the future. My mother had a saying that I frequently refer to,” Remember, all this too shall pass”. We are Americans and we will survive. Keep the faith, and wash your hands.



From Norman's Desk

It's hard to know what to write in times like these. Part of me wants to be snarky and say "I told you to prepare." This is the worst case scenario looming before us

Part of me wants to rail against an inept federal government that squandered time and resources to prepare for this inevitable and predicted event.

A bigger part of me wants to be inspirational to give hope. Yes, I believe that we will get through this because there are heroes working every day to save lives and keep every vital services functioning.

But it is hard to be hopeful when you have to worry about the "What ifs." What if my aide can't come anymore? What if my power-chair breaks down? What if I run out of stuff that I need? Nagging thoughts that grow bigger in isolation and stress.

For a long time I have written about having disability pride because we succeed despite having lives that are precarious. We are also resilient, resourceful, and have "on-the-fly" adaptable management skills that make our success possible. Adversity is nothing new to people with disabilities.

We will survive this! The cost in our freedoms and rights as people with disabilities may be high as they are trampled on "for the greater good" or "for our own safety." But we will get through this.

Once this crisis has passed, however, we need to make sure that our lives are never again endangered by lack of planning, complacency, or gross indifference to our lives. As a community, we need to work together to better prepare for the next inevitable and predictable threat event.

Let us learn this lesson and move forward!

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear." — President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

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How to Protect Yourself From Coronavirus

The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. The virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet). through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.

Older adults and people who have severe underlying chronic medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes seem to be at higher risk for developing more serious complications from COVID-19 illness. Please consult with your health care provider about additional steps you may be able to take to protect yourself.



Clean and disinfect

Clean AND disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets, and sinks.

- **If surfaces are dirty, clean them:** Use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.



Wash your hands often

- **Wash your hands** often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, **use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.** Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth** with unwashed hands.



Cover coughs and sneezes

- **Cover your mouth and nose** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- **Throw used tissues** in the trash.
- Immediately **wash your hands** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Social Security offices are closing their doors due to coronavirus, but help with benefits is still available

Reprinted from DisabilityScoop by Shaun Heasley | March 19, 2020

The Social Security Administration said this week that its local offices across the nation are now closed to the public for in-person service. Officials said the move will protect both the agency's employees and its beneficiaries, many of whom are considered to be at high risk for severe illness from COVID-19. More than 69 million Americans receive monthly payments from Social Security, including 8 million Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries, many of whom have disabilities.

Social Security will continue to offer assistance by phone, both from local offices and through its national number (1-800-772-1213), and the agency said many services are available on its website. A dedicated webpage details what services are still being offered. Despite the changes, Social Security said that payments to beneficiaries will continue as usual.

Be aware that scammers may try to trick you into thinking the pandemic is stopping your Social Security payments but that is not true. Individuals who already have appointments or hearings scheduled will be contacted to make alternate arrangements, officials said.

Senate Passes Bill Expanding Access To Respite Care

By Shaun Heasley | Reprinted from DisabilityScoop | February 26, 2020

Lawmakers are pressing ahead with a plan to increase federal funding to support respite care for families of those with disabilities and other special needs.

The U.S. Senate unanimously approved a bill this week known as the Lifespan Respite Care Reauthorization Act of 2019, or S.995, which would authorize \$50 million over the next five years for the Lifespan Respite Care Program, a system of community-based respite care services across the country.

The bipartisan measure would renew an existing law that dates back to 2006 and boost spending on the effort to \$10 million annually. Traditionally, the program has received just \$2.5 million each year.

To date, the federal government has provided grants to 37 states and Washington, D.C. through the respite care program to streamline the delivery of services, coordinate resources and offer training to respite providers and family caregivers.



Kayde Gustafson swims with other children who have autism at the YMCA in Austin, Minn. during a respite night where parents can drop off their kids and get a break from caregiving. (David Joles/Star Tribune/TNS)

Backers of the bill note that there are an estimated 45 million family caregivers in the U.S. providing some \$470 billion annually in uncompensated care. Most have not used any respite care services at all.

“Respite care is essential to caregivers as it helps to reduce mental stress and physical health issues they may experience,” said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine., who introduced the legislation. “With Senate passage of our bill, we are one step closer to giving family caregivers and their loved ones the support they need by ensuring that quality respite is available and accessible.”

The House of Representatives passed a similar bill last summer, but differences between the two versions will need to be reconciled before the legislation can go to the president.

Feds Weigh In On Special Ed, Medicaid Concerns Over Coronavirus

by Michelle Diamant / Reprinted from DisAbility Scoop March 13, 2020

As coronavirus spreads across the U.S., federal officials are clarifying how schools and state Medicaid agencies should address the needs of those with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Education and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services each issued question-and-answer documents Thursday detailing how to continue serving students with disabilities and those receiving home- and community-based services, respectively.

The Education Department said that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act do not specify what should occur if schools are closed for an extended period of time, which is considered more than 10 consecutive days. However, schools should generally offer the same level of services to students with disabilities that they are providing to other children. "If (a school district) closes its schools to slow or stop the spread of COVID-19, and does not provide any educational services to the general student population, then (a school district) would not be required to provide services to students with disabilities during that same period of time," reads the nine-page Q&A from the Education Department. "If (a school district) continues to provide educational opportunities to the general student population during a school closure, the school must ensure that students with disabilities also have equal access to the same opportunities."

Individualized education program teams may incorporate distance learning in contingency plans for school closures, according to the Education Department. That could mean providing services at the child's home, at an alternate location, via an online platform or over the telephone.

In cases where schools remain open, but a child with a disability is absent because they have the coronavirus, the child's IEP team must assess if the student would benefit from homebound instruction, the guidance indicates.

Officials said that if children with disabilities miss out on special education for an extended period because of a closure or illness, compensatory services may be warranted.

Already, at least 10,600 schools across the country have announced plans to shut their doors due to the pandemic, according to Education Week.

The Education Department has been under pressure from lawmakers to weigh in on how schools should handle special education if they close and the agency had been at work on the guidance for nearly a week before it was issued Thursday afternoon. "We are working closely with our interagency partners to provide state and local leaders the information they need to ensure the health and safety of their students and educators," said Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. "We will continue to work alongside them and provide them the flexibilities they need in order to best support their communities." Separate guidance from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services also issued Thursday outlines what options state Medicaid agencies have.

In cases where people with disabilities receiving home- and community-based services are quarantined, family members already living with the individual can be paid to provide care, according to the frequently-asked-questions document. Medicaid beneficiaries may also qualify for meals delivered through Meals on Wheels, private duty nursing and higher pay for providers to account for the health risk involved. "Access to Medicaid services provided in an individual's private home or group residential setting should not change because the beneficiary is quarantined," the guidance states.

For those with disabilities living in institutional settings who are quarantined, existing infection control policies would apply, CMS said.



Custodian Daniel Secoy uses a special gun with PURTABS sanitizing and disinfection tablets to spray down the desks and chairs of every room inside Chillicothe Intermediate School in Chillicothe, Ohio.

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Due to the coronavirus pandemic, and in order to protect our tenants and staff, Project Freedom Inc. is taking the following actions:

1. All activities and meetings are being cancelled until further notice.
2. Until further notice our Community Centers are closed.
3. We are alternating staff at our projects, so we will not have all employees at the site at any one time. Tenants should call the office prior to coming over--we are trying to limit personal interactions that can spread the virus, so anything that can be communicated over the phone, should be done in that manner.
4. Only emergency repairs will be done at this time. This means real emergencies, such as no heat, no hot water, etc.
5. Tenants should leave their rent check payments in the drop box outside in the lobby of each project. If a tenant pays cash, please call to arrange to see one of our staff at the office. Again, we are trying to limit the number of personal actions for all our protection.
6. Staff will be closely monitoring their phone messages, and email, so please leave a message and someone will contact you as soon as possible.

Please know that these are extraordinary times, and we all need to do our part, in order to break this cycle of infection. We thank everyone for your understanding and cooperation.


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