



COVID-19

The impact of COVID-19 on disabled people

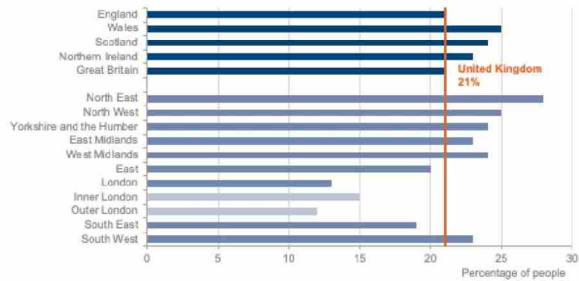
May 2020

OFFICIAL SENSITIVE - DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION - NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY

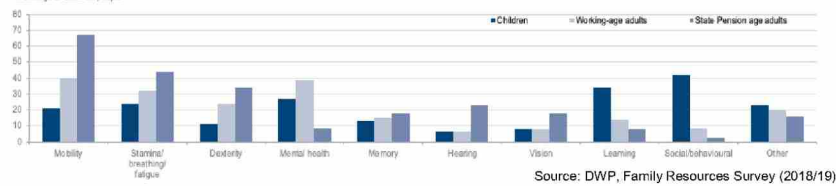
Disabled People: the context

- Equality Act: A person is considered to have a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effects on their ability to do normal daily activities
- 21% of people in Britain are disabled (c.14.1m people)
 - 8% of children
 - 19% of the working age population
 - 44% of pension age adults
- Key issues arise for education, housing, travel, employment, healthcare, independent living, sustaining friendships, leisure activities, shopping...and all areas of life
- **Manifesto commitment to produce National Strategy for Disabled People - in rebuilding post-COVID-19 we have the opportunity to do something really ambitious**

Disability prevalence by region/country, 2018/19, UK



Impairment types reported by disabled people, by age group, 2018/19, UK



Source: DWP, Family Resources Survey (2018/19)

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Findings

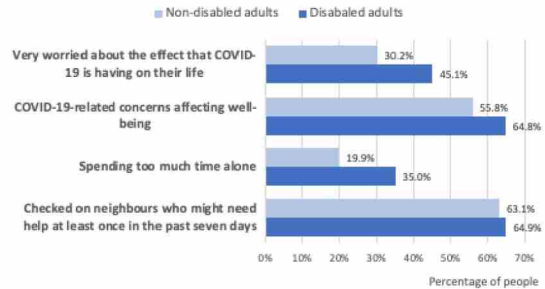
- **Further data on the impact of COVID-19 on disabled people will be key in guiding our response, eg health and employment**
- Both regular official surveys and more immediate, targeted actions are starting to build the data picture
- Data and insights from disability groups has been very valuable, though much is anecdotal
- Indications are that social distancing and lockdown measures are impacting disabled people disproportionately
- VCSE sector organisations are struggling financially and operationally

A survey of (2,713) people **shielding** in England who usually work found that:

- 38% can work from home and are currently working
- 13% can work from home but have stopped or been furloughed
- 32% cannot work from home but can meet financial obligations
- 17% cannot work from home and can't or aren't sure that they can meet financial obligations if they stop work

- DHSC is exploring existing datasets to gain greater insight into, eg health impacts and deaths, and extending the scope of a PHE review into the risk and outcomes of COVID-19 to cover disabled people.
- ONS are adding questions on employment impacts on disabled people eg furloughing and for the self employed to the Labour Force Survey - April-June results expected in August.

The social impacts of COVID-19 on disabled adults (period 27/3 to 13/04)



Source: ONS, Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain (2020)



Findings

- **At pace, new programmes have been developed and existing programmes flexed to meet the needs of disabled people**
- Quick action has sometimes followed stakeholder feedback; eg to relax confinement rules to allow people with autism and certain other disabilities to exercise more than once a day, highlighted as good practice by the UN
- Guidance to local authorities has been key given their responsibilities to disabled people
- Departments have made good progress on making information accessible, but there is more to do

To address the effect of COVID-19:

DfE is providing an additional £10m for the Family Fund Trust to **help low income families with disabled children**; and **providing basic IT and internet access** to those who need it, which will include children and young people with SEND.

DWP's Access to Work programme is providing **extra support and flexibilities** including:

- Prioritising new applications from key workers and those with jobs starting within the next 4 weeks;
- Extending the timeframe customers have to submit payment claim forms by 3 months meaning customers would have up to 9 months to submit claim forms;
- Adapting the way assessments are undertaken.

DEFRA is in a **regular dialogue with charities** representing disabled people and retailers, to better understand the issues faced and what can be done to help.

DWP has **suspended all face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits** for 3 months to protect vulnerable people, with telephone assessments introduced. There is automatic extension of awards for 6 months for those due for review in 3 months, to give certainty to disabled people.

MHCLG is providing £10m to fund services that support **victims of domestic abuse** - including targeting those supporting the most vulnerable groups, such as victims with disabilities.

Feedback from stakeholders: *"there have been instances of passenger assistance staff refusing to support disabled people".*

Action: the Transport Accessibility Minister has written to the rail industry to make clear that disabled people should be given exactly the same assistance during lockdown as before.

Findings

- Accessible communications is vital, from both Government and service providers
- Impact assessments and stakeholder insights are vital in understanding the needs of disabled people for the next phase
- There is an opportunity to gain further insight from the lived experience of disabled people's lives
- The Public Sector Equality Duty remains key, for the value it offers not as a bureaucratic step
- Service providers (public and private sector) will need to ensure staff know how to support disabled people

BEIS: Government worked with businesses, unions and others, as well as PHE and the HSE, to draft at pace the guidance on safe return to work that included consideration of the needs of disabled employees and customers.

DFT: revised transport guidance for travellers and operators considers in detail the needs of disabled passengers.

DHSC: scenario work has looked ahead to consider potential issues for disabled people, eg if there is a mass roll out of face-masks how this will impact people with hearing impairments being able to communicate with others?

Feedback from stakeholders: *some disability groups have expressed concerns about particular cohorts not being helped through the shielding programme, and that their members are disadvantaged because the supermarkets are offering prioritised delivery slots for shielding individuals.*
Action: DEFRA has secured extra supermarket delivery slots for the dedicated use of those finding difficulty accessing food. These slots are in addition to those set aside for the extremely clinically vulnerable (shielded).

Findings

- Services which have moved to online delivery can be more convenient and accessible for some disabled people, but not all
- There are examples of services or structures that will have to change permanently, and this can benefit disabled people
- Relationships that have been built to allow effective cross-sector partnership during COVID-19 can be developed and solidified to continue to positively impact disabled people
- There is scope to capitalise on the volunteer/community support that has developed (though some risks here)

Stakeholder feedback: *"We would also expect that lessons have been learned from this situation and highlight that early engagement with representative charities is key to successful outcomes in these kinds of unprecedented situations."* (Disability Rights UK)

As Government develops the National Strategy for Disabled People, we will work with Departments to incorporate the lessons that have been learned and incorporate the steps that we have taken.

DFT: are exploring how changes in the way we travel could have positive impacts on disabled people's lives. Whether this is more staggered travel patterns or ticketing reform as there is increased home working, it will provide opportunities.

Greater use of digital technology provides a huge opportunity, for example by bringing people together and tackling loneliness. We need to ensure that disabled people are able to access and benefit from this. GDS is an expert on accessible web platforms so we are well placed to be world leaders.

DWP: New ways of carrying out assessments during COVID-19 may bring lessons for the longer term.



Next steps

Members are invited to agree:

- That **we must do more to improve our understanding** in key areas such as health, employment and education
- That **we should continue and strengthen engagement with disability stakeholders**, to gain insight and so we can consider the needs of disabled people from the outset
- That we **make all our communications fully accessible** for disabled people
- That we **search out lessons for the rebuilding strategy and the National Strategy for Disabled People**, to make the UK the best place in the world to be a disabled person
- That, as a next step, each department:
 - develops a **plan for addressing key evidence gaps**
 - **agrees to meet the Disability Unit** to discuss these plans and the other actions
- That **a further check in on progress at MIG** take place in about 6 weeks