

HOW CAN LGUs PROTECT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AMIDST THE COVID-19 CRISIS

KEY MESSAGES

- In regular time, barriers and lack of support generate significant inequalities and vulnerabilities for persons with disabilities.
- The barriers and inequality faced by persons with disabilities are exacerbated during the COVID-19 crisis
- All COVID 19 response have to be inclusive and accessible of persons with disabilities
- Additional In kind and in cash assistance is required to cover the specific needs and increased vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities and their families, especially children with disabilities, persons with high support requirements and older persons with disabilities
- Coordination with organization of persons with disabilities is critical to ensure maximum outreach and dissemination of information

Background information

Representing 12% of the population, persons with significant disability¹ are in general more likely living in situation of poverty, less likely to receive the health care they need, have lower levels of education and to be unemployed or self-employed in the informal sector. Across all ages and sectors, they face barriers which include stigma, lack of accessibility of physical environment, transportation, information and communication, lack of inclusive policies, support services and social protection.

Persons with disabilities and their families face additional disability related expenditures on top of the general basic household consumption. Those in need of personal assistance, mostly rely on unpaid personal support provided by family member, which often imply less income for the household. At least 1 in four households have one or more member with disabilities and they are often more exposed to economic insecurity and shocks².

All those elements contribute to higher level of poverty amongst persons with disabilities than the general population (40% in NCR and 60% in Rosario, Batangas)³. The Covid-19 crisis and the enhanced lockdown exacerbate those barriers and inequalities and increase vulnerabilities of most persons with disabilities and their families, not only those already living in poverty.

COVID-19 crisis increased vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities

A key issue impacted people with disabilities are that they may not get timely information related to COVID-19 crisis because information is not provided in different accessible format. While DPOs have started to work with TV news programs to include sign language interpreters, most websites does not comply to accessibility standards and information remain inaccessible to many people with visual impairment, deaf and hard of hearing, persons with intellectual disabilities, etc.

The quick survey⁴ conducted thru the support of Center for Disaster Preparedness (CDP) show that beyond the loss of income which can have dramatic consequences for persons with disabilities and their families who already are at disadvantage, they have to deal with disability specific issues e.g. need for non-food items such as catheter, urine bag, diapers, and maintenance medicine, care services,

¹Philippine Statistics Authority, 2019, National Disability Prevalence Survey (Model of Functioning) 2016

²Mitra, S., 2018, Disability, health and humandevelopment. Disability, Health and Human Development, Palgrave MacMillan: New York

³Philippine Institute for Development Studies, Yap, Reyes, Tabuga et al

⁴ CDP Survey gathered information from 4,385 household which included 5,961 persons with disabilities about impact of COVID quarantine and their needs <https://datastudio.google.com/u/0/reporting/1OjE6Q32qwpzsp9atbHWCF4SpuVfp-5/page/hCNJB?s=hoABGjDf56j> (last accessed on 13 April 2020)

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nutritional requirements, etc. , suspension of the operation of public transportation, the availability of disability-related services e.g. rehabilitation, treatment, not having the appropriate assistive products.

Worst, persons with disabilities including children as well as women and girls with disabilities are potentially exposed to violence, exploitation, abuse and other domestic violence. For instance, a person with psychosocial disability may exhibit aggressiveness because of stress or anxiety which may result to inappropriate social engagement to frontliners or neighbors.

Addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in Local Government COVID 19 response

Only 3% of respondents of the CDP survey declared that they do not have any needs while the community quarantine is in effect. The vast majority have multiple needs with the main requests for support being financial support, medicine and maintenance supply, accessible transportation and personal assistance.

Key measures that LGU can take to ensure an inclusive COVID 19 response

- Ensure accessibility of information and communication system, particularly in awareness-raising activities and service delivery;
- Work with organizations of persons with disabilities including organizations representing children with disabilities:
 - to identify and address barriers and needs of persons with disabilities
 - to identify persons with disabilities in need for support beyond those registered in existing database (Disability card, 4Ps...)
- Ensure that persons with disabilities and their households benefit from all social assistance related to COVID-19 response provided to the general population;
- Provide cash assistance to persons with disabilities under the Assistance on Individuals in Crisis (AICS) program in coordination with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to help cover disability-related extra cost such as purchase of catheter, diaper, medicines, compensation for carers, etc.;
- Set up help line so that persons with disabilities can ask for information or support
- Ensure delivery of essential food and non-food items to persons with disabilities isolated at home
- Ensure that implementation of all existing programs whether existing or in response to COVID-19 crisis are disability-inclusive (disability-based exclusion or restriction of benefits should be prevented);
- Ensure transportation service are available and accessible to persons with disabilities so that they can perform their task whether it is household related task such as going to market or health related task such as going to hospital or clinic;