



## **Points for Urgent Consideration and Immediate Action on challenges faced by people with disabilities during COVID- 19**

We appreciate the Central Government for issuing the comprehensive disability inclusive guidelines for protection and safety of persons with disabilities during COVID-19. However, there seems to be ambiguity on how people with disabilities would be supported as there were no standard operating procedures laid down.

Based on a cross disability consultation on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020 via zoom with over 30 individuals with disabilities from various parts of the country, who not only shared their issues during lock down but also made some suggestions for immediate action.

Please find below a list of Key Issues and Suggested Interventions that we discussed and collated for your kind attention.

### **1. Access to food rations and cooked food**

#### **Key Issues**

Persons with disabilities are not able to access food (ration and cooked food) as they are unable to reach the ration shops/place where food is getting distributed due to inaccessibility and lack of awareness by suppliers of rations. A lot of people with disabilities who do not have the BPL cards have lost jobs and unable to access ration/food.

#### **Suggested Interventions**

1. Create a Database of People with Disabilities: As mandated in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, please instruct all State and District Disaster Management Authorities with the support of State Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities and State/District level Disabled People's Organisations and NGOs to draw up the database of people with disabilities. A simple system to self-registration (with minimum documentation) and a door-to-door survey for registering to be implemented. In the case of individuals who may not already be counted officially as people with disabilities, or those who may not have the disability certificate or unique



disability ID, provisions should be made to ensure that those without official documentation of their disability can still self-register on the database.

2. Issue an Advisory to designated ration shops and Canteens (where food is being distributed) in each Panchayat/ local body to deliver food to the door of persons with disabilities. In the delivery of food, for each person, a minimum ration of the following should be ensured: aata, dal, rice, salt, oil and toiletries. Key officers to be appointed at ward/panchayat level for example Sarpanch, Zilla officer, ward officer and definitely SHO as responsible for addressing needs of people with disabilities and arranging doorstep delivery.

## **2. Access to caregivers, curfew passes, transportation and PPE**

### **Key Issues**

Many people with disabilities who were dependent on caregivers have been stranded without a caregiver as a result of sudden lockdown. Caregivers are unable to reach due to lack of transport and also because of the scare. Caregivers are like health workers and nurses providing essential service. Police Department which issues curfew passes are not aware that caregiving service is an essential service and they harass people.

### **Suggested Interventions**

1. People with disabilities and their caregivers to be provided with free PPE (masks, gloves and sanitizers). It should be delivered to their homes along with ration.
2. Create a helpline/designate an officer for separate issuance and renewal of curfew passes, access to food, social security and other aspects.
3. Issue an Advisory to Police to treat caregivers the same as other health workers and provide all the needed support as they are providing essential services to people with disabilities.
4. Announce the Caregiver allowance as mandated in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 Section 24(3)i
5. Create a system to facilitate transportation of caregivers. Instruct State Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities to collaborate with



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Ola/Uber to provide free transport to caregivers during the lockdown period.



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### **3. Access to Healthcare**

#### **Key Issues**

There are several barriers that people are facing in accessing healthcare services. Doctors and medical professionals are deprioritizing people with disabilities assuming that they have a lesser quality of life.

#### **Suggested Interventions**

1. Instruct the Health Ministry to ensure that testing centres and quarantine zones sanctioned by the government are to be accessible for persons with disabilities as per the norms mentioned in the RPWD Act of 2016. Give priority to people with disabilities.
2. Train health workers and medical professionals in testing and treating persons with disabilities without compromising their dignity and rights.
3. Develop a scheme for free/subsidised medicines for specific life-saving drugs for people with disabilities, particularly for people with blood disorders, multiple sclerosis and other medical conditions who require expensive medicines.
4. Ensure adequate blood supply in hospitals for people with blood disorders.
5. Provide free transport for persons with disabilities to reach the clinics/health centre for essential healthcare services. Additionally, home based services and video based (accessible) services to be introduced for consultation.
6. Necessary services for persons with disabilities, including physical therapy/occupational therapy, should be considered as essential services and should continue to be made available during the lockdown. Passes for persons with disability to access these and other life-saving services should be made available with no delays.
7. Regularly used medicines by people with chronic illnesses and disability should be kept in reserve to ensure that they do not run out. Much misinformation about the efficacy of different drugs to treat COVID19 is being spread at this point, causing persons with disabilities to suffer due to a lack of access to necessary medications.



## **4. Access to information**

### **Key Issues**

People with disabilities are having difficulties in accessing information. They have to rely on second hand information. Deaf people are unable to access information conveyed by the media due to lack of captions and sign language. DD Bharti has a sign language box but the size of the box is too small to view clearly and the quality of interpretation is poor. Another major issue is that people with hearing disabilities who lip read are unable to communicate with doctors/health workers. There is a design of mask that has transparent material in the mouth portion. It is a prototype. We don't think it being produced in India

### **Suggested Interventions**

1. Encourage all masks producing companies to produce masks that have a transparent material at the mouth portion.
2. Arogya Setu App should have a dedicated section with specific information for people with disabilities. It should also have a section in Indian Sign Language explaining the very same points.
3. The accessible elections app can also be used and updated with new features as it already has data on persons with disabilities. It could be one of the ways to reach persons with disabilities.
4. Sign language interpretation and captions as well as audio descriptions of all new updates and awareness campaigns to be done on a priority basis. Ideally, when the Honourable Prime Minister or the Secretary, or anyone doing a press briefing, sign language interpretation should be mandatory standing by the side of the person speaking. This will then not only be picked up by all channels, but information would be more accurate rather than through a third party.

## **5. Welfare Schemes**

### **Key Issues**

As per the Garib Kalyan Yojana Rs. 1000/- has been sanctioned towards the welfare of persons with disabilities. This ex-gratia amount is highly inadequate. The cost of living of persons with disabilities is higher than non-disabled people. RPWD Act also recognises this fact. The Act provides



for 25% more allowance for people with disabilities, unemployment and care giver allowance. These have not been implemented. Many people with disabilities have lost jobs and livelihood due to the lockdown. They face additional challenges accessing welfare schemes.

### **Suggested Interventions**

1. The ex-gratia money (Garib Kalyan Yojana) should be increased to a minimum of Rs. 5000 per month.
2. People with disabilities who have lost jobs to be able to register easily for getting this allowance (Refer to Point 1 regarding the database).
3. Urgently announce unemployment allowance for people with disabilities and caregiving allowance as mandated by Section 24(3) h & i respectively of the RPWD Act of 2016.
4. Announce a special package for entrepreneurs who were people with disabilities and who have lost their livelihood now.

## **6. Budgetary Allocation**

### **Key Issues**

Many of the advisories/ guidelines do not get implemented if there is no adequate budgetary allocation. Most Ministries do not allocate funds for disability. The Disaster Management Authority has not allocated a budget for disability even though the National Disaster Management Guidelines on Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction clearly state the same in Chapter 4, Page # 37 <https://nidm.gov.in/pdf/guidelines/new/didrr.pdf>).

### **Suggested Interventions**

1. Instruct all Ministries and others involved in COVID-19 relief to allocate 5-10% of the funds for people with disabilities.
2. Disaster Management Authority should allocate budget for providing relief for persons with disabilities as per the guidelines drafted by them.
3. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs to issue an order to companies to be inclusive of people with disabilities in their CSR programmes.
4. Ask officials handling PM Care Fund and other funds for COVID 19 to provide disaggregated data in terms of beneficiaries and budget spent on persons with disabilities.