



The impact of COVID-19 on people with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland: Implications for policy and practice¹.



¹This report is a co-production between a team from Ulster University led by Professor Laurence Taggart, Professor Roy McConkey, Dr Peter Mulhall and three organisations providing services and support to people with learning disabilities in Northern Ireland (CAN, Mencap NI and Positive Futures) and Families Involved in Northern Ireland (FINI). It forms part of a UK research project funded by the Medical Research Council with Professor Chris Hatton (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Professor Richard Hastings (University of Warwick) as Principal Investigators. Further details about the project are given in Appendix 1. The Appendices to accompany the report can be downloaded at: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/covid-19-impact>.

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What is this report and who is it for?

This is an Easy Read summary report of the Ulster University report, **'The Impact of COVID-19 on people with learning disabilities in NI: Implications for policy and practice'**.

It is about how COVID-19 has affected the health, well-being and social activities of people with a learning disability.

This report may be useful if:

- you have a learning disability
- you are the family/carer of a person with a learning disability

This report can help you to understand:

- How people with a learning disability have been affected by COVID.
- The effect of the closure of day centres and respite services on families.
- Why learning disability services need to change.
- Action needed by the Government.
- How human rights of people with a learning disability have been affected.

You can read the full report at <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/covid-19-impact>

You can also contact Ulster University for further information.
All of our contact information is included at the end of this report.

About this report

This report is by **Ulster University**

What is the report about?



Research has been carried out around the world to find out how COVID-19 has affected adults with a learning disability.

This report is about what Ulster University found out had affected people with a learning disability in Northern Ireland.

What was done?



Ulster University carried out interviews with the same people, three times.

This was done by phone or on Zoom. They did this between December 2020 and August 2021

Who took part?



621 people took part in the research.

127 of them were from Northern Ireland.

378 carers also took part in the research.

62 of them were from Northern Ireland.

What did we find out?

People with a learning disability were more affected by COVID-19 than other people in N.I.



Over half of all people with a learning disability have a health condition that means they have to be more careful not to catch COVID-19.

People with a learning disability catch COVID-19 at a younger age than people without a learning disability.



People with a learning disability may have more effects to their health if they catch COVID-19 and are more likely to go to hospital than a person without a learning disability.

Some of the people who took part in this research knew people who had died from COVID-19.

Some health and social care services have not returned to normal or re-started.



Closed

Some Day centres and respite services have still not re-opened or are not running as normal.

Services for people with a learning disability need to be looked at to see what changes should be made.



The Government needs to look at what can be done to protect health and social care services in the winter months.

The Government also needs to look at how it can get more people to work in social care



The Government may be told that it is damaging the human rights of people with a learning disability.

Following Covid-19 rules and restrictions

People with a learning disability have been good at sticking to the COVID restrictions.



Most people with a learning disability wore a face mask when they were out.



Most people with a learning disability have had the COVID vaccine and said they would have the booster jab.

Most people with a learning disability thought that support staff should be made to be vaccinated by law.



Some people had to stay home more and try not to have too much contact with other people. This is called shielding.

By August 2021 a lot less people with a learning disability were shielding.



Only some people with a learning disability used technology like the COVID-19 App on their phone.

How people's health has been affected



The pandemic has affected the mental health of people with a learning disability. This has made a lot of them feel angry, sad or worried even though they are now allowed to do more things.

A lot of people who normally have a health check every year, did not have the check done in the last eighteen months.



People with a learning disability have seen less of their doctor and other healthcare workers.

Some people with a learning disability had medical tests and appointments cancelled.



Access to healthcare services is still not back to normal.

How Covid-19 has affected activities in the community



The social lives of people with a learning disability are still affected by COVID 19.

This has made some of them feel angry, confused and bored.

They have not always been allowed to have visitors or take part in activities in the community.

A lot of people have not all been able to carry out paid or voluntary work that they normally do.

People with a learning disability said that they wanted COVID-19 to go away and that they wanted everyone to get vaccinated.



Only a small amount of people with a learning disability have been able to go on holiday and spend time with their family and friends.

A lot of people felt that their lives were still not back to normal.

Access to support services



Day centres and services have stopped or do not run for as many hours.

Some people with a learning disability have not been able to go to college classes or do not get to spend as much time at college.

Less people with a learning disability have been able to go on respite breaks.



People with a learning disability have had less visits from their social worker and some only speak on the phone.

Impact on carers



Some families and carers felt that they needed a rest as they do not get much help.

Families and carers feel that their own health has been affected and have contacted their doctor more.



Some carers of people with a learning disability feel that their mental health has got worse.

Families and carers of people with a learning disability feel they have had to provide more support because services have not been running as usual.



Family and carers of people with a learning disability find it difficult to find information about COVID-19.

What needs to happen



Learning Disability services need to be better prepared for emergencies like COVID-19 and have plans in place for the future. People with a learning disability, their families and carers should be involved in making plans.



Health services need to think about people's social and emotional wellbeing, especially vulnerable people like those with a learning disability and how they can support them. More money needs to be spent on Social care services as soon as possible to make services run better. This includes getting more people to work in social care.



Learning disability day services need to change the way they work to make sure that they are doing the things that are important to people with a learning disability, their family and carers.



Learning disability day services need to change the way that they work so that they have plans in place for each service user and their carer depending on their own needs.



Government agencies need to look at their COVID-19 guidance and change it if it needs to be written in more accessible words or given out in different ways that people with a learning disability can understand.



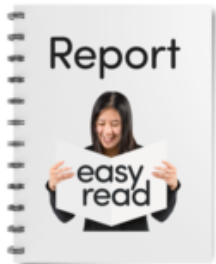
Health and support services need to need to carry out risk assessments for COVID-19 and make plans for restarting services.

What next?



Information sessions will be held to tell others about the facts that the research has found and to see what others think about what needs to be done.

This report will be sent to the people and organisations who have been involved in putting together this report.



The report will be discussed with the NI Assembly and the All-Party Group for Learning Disability on 3rd December 2021.

Reports about this for Scotland, Wales and England will also be looked at to help decide what needs to change in Northern Ireland.



The research team hope to meet with Ministers, Committees and officials to talk about what they found out and what changes need to be made.

Find out more

You can find out more about this and other work we do by:



Calling us on 028 9036 6538



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