



Glasgow Disability Alliance
Confident Connected Contributing

GDA's Covid-Resilience Engagement and Response

**Interim report
27 April 2020**

Glasgow Disability Alliance is run by and for our 5000+ members – all disabled people and people with long term conditions across the Greater Glasgow area.

Since 20th March 2020 the GDA team has undertaken intensive outreach with thousands of disabled people, to understand and offer support with the particular impacts and needs arising from the pandemic, shielding and lockdown.

Outreach 20th March - 24th April has included:

- Letters and surveys to 5000+ disabled people
- Wellbeing phone calls to 1550
- In-depth survey completed by 1177
- Peer support groups online discussions, with digital support from the GDA team.



Through this engagement, **GDA members are providing vital evidence** of the **actions needed** to protect disabled people during and after the COVID19 pandemic. Our members' experience make it clear that:

1. COVID-19 is supercharging inequalities already faced by disabled people.

Disabled people are harder hit by the pandemic not only because we may be at greater risk of severe illness – but equally or more so - because existing inequalities and persistent barriers like isolation and digital exclusion make it harder for us to stay safe and protect our families.

2. The COVID response risks leaving disabled people behind.

Adding to these risks, lifeline services are being removed and our very rights to life are on the line. It is more important than ever that disabled people's voices are heard – and that the issues raised by the vast numbers we've spoken to are acted on in the response efforts. There are ongoing lessons to be learned and swift actions needed, to make sure that disabled people aren't left behind.

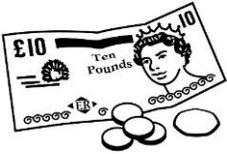
For more Info contact GDA on 0141 556 7103 info@gdaonline.co.uk

Easyread images courtesy of ChangePeople.org

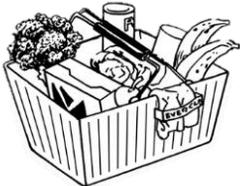
1. The Covid pandemic is supercharging inequalities already faced by disabled people.



40% of disabled people we have spoken to are worried about food, medication or money.



Existing **poverty and financial exclusion** mean many disabled people have **no way to pay bills or buy essentials** under lockdown. Many are falling between the cracks, with huge **delays** in the **benefits system**.



Food insecurity has spiked: many disabled people already reliant on foodbanks or supermarket deliveries tell us they are left **short of food**, as demand has overwhelmed these services, and **shielding helplines are not always able to help**.

“

Foodbanks have closed down and the Shielding helpline rang out. When I got through they said it would take a week and they were too busy to pick up my medication.

I've always used supermarket deliveries as it's the only way I can shop - but now I can't get a slot.

The bank is closed so I can't get my money out as I can't use the hole in the wall.

I need help to physically pay bills as I pay in person at the post office but now I can't get there.

They increased universal credit but not disability benefits [ESA, DLA, PIP] – everyday items are costing more and even harder to access, plus my utilities are all going up, and I've been told it's my job to buy PPE for my carers.

I've been fighting for my benefits since 2018 now I don't know what to do – how much longer is it going to take?

I applied for a Crisis grant just before the pandemic – 7 weeks later I've still not heard back.

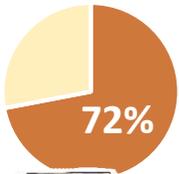
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**Resilience
Response**

In the last 5 weeks GDA has provided:

- Welfare Rights support to 100+ disabled people
- Urgent essentials to 304 disabled people (including food, medication, communication resources)
- Registered a further 571 disabled people at risk of crisis, needing imminent support in coming weeks.



72% said isolation is a major worry.

Isolation, already twice as high* amongst disabled people of all ages, is now even more acute.



Other issues like digital exclusion, inaccessible housing, or unmet support needs can mean that for disabled people, increased isolation has serious consequences, for safety, mental and physical health, and resilience.

“ My biggest worry is loneliness and falling into depression and anxiety if I feel too isolated.

I’m completely isolated, registered blind and my mental health support has been cut.

GDA are the only ones who have contacted me in 4 weeks to see how I’m doing. I’m cut off from friends and family, no one has chapped my door to see if I need anything.

I live alone with no one to talk to – the isolation really hurts.

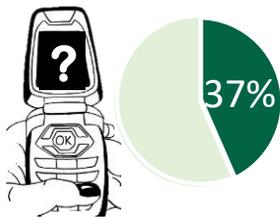
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Resilience Response

The GDA team has had over 3000 conversations, with 2500 people, averaging 250 hours per week, since March 20th. Emergency funding secured for a Wellbeing Helpline to enhance this work.

Connecting members by phone and online to peer support and specialist services.



Vital Information is not reaching disabled people in clear, accessible formats.

Digital exclusion is a huge factor: only 37% of those surveyed have home broadband, and many lack the confidence or skills to use it.



Despite a huge mobilisation of local voluntary sector responses, of disabled people we spoke to **76% were not aware of any of these local support services or were unable to access them.**



“ I don’t know what group I’m in or what advice to follow. Didn’t know I should stay in for 12 weeks. I can’t understand – they need to use plain English. I got a letter from the government which I couldn’t read – I panicked and thought I was in trouble So much is online now and I can’t access it.

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Resilience Response
Connecting disabled people to information and services including digital inclusion work locally and nationally.

* <http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1712/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-scotland-a-review-of-prevalence-and-trends.pdf>

2. The Covid-response risks leaving disabled people behind

Lifeline services are being removed, at a time of acute need and uncertainty, leaving many disabled people additionally vulnerable.

Social Care

Cut to the bone under austerity, vital social care supports have been withdrawn from a further 1884 people in Glasgow since 19th March.

Many disabled people have been left reliant on neighbours, other vulnerable relatives, or simply with no-one to meet intimate personal care needs like meals, medications, support to shower or use the toilet. **Our members warn this is unacceptable, and far from sustainable, yet many fear their care may never be reinstated.**

“ I was told my personal care was ‘non-critical’ so would be stopping immediately, for the foreseeable ”

Mental Health

Many GDA members with existing / long term mental health conditions report being unable to access vital mental health supports, with mental health teams uncontactable, leaving them extremely vulnerable. Investment to widen access to low-level mental health support is overdue, but especially welcome at this difficult time. However our evidence warns this must not come at the expense of vital supports for those with long term mental health support needs.

“ I can’t get through to my CPN. There’s no provision for people with mental illness, in fact our services have been removed. ”

Rights to life are on the line

GDA members fear that ‘resource rationing’ guidelines are stripping them of their rights to equal access to potentially life-saving treatment. Several individuals have reported feeling pressured into agreeing Do Not Resuscitate notices, or being told they won’t be eligible for hospital treatment if they fall ill.

Over 90% said they want disabled people’s voices to be heard, in decisions about their own lives, and the evolving Covid-response.

“ My mum who is fit and well was called by her GP and asked ‘If you die do you want us to bring you back?’ She said no because of how it was framed. When we spoke it through later she realised what it meant and felt very differently. She phoned back to tell them – but not everyone has support to understand these decisions. ”

GDA is calling on leaders from all sectors to address the specific impacts of COVID19 and the response, on disabled people. Work with us to protect rights and mitigate the unequal impacts highlighted by our members.

For more information contact us: 0141 556 7103 info@gdaonline.co.uk

