



March 9, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pence  
Vice-President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Vice-President:

The 64 organizations, identified in the attached statement are writing to you as the leader of the Administration's effort to control COVID-19. All of the undersigned organizations are leading advocates in the disability community across the country.

**We make a very straightforward request:** Please direct all the agencies involved in this effort to consider the specific COVID-19 issues faced by persons with disabilities and older adults, the community organizations supporting them, and expressly address these needs in their plans and statements. We are attaching our National Call to Action adopted by these organizations outlining some of the current, emerging, and anticipated issues.

We appreciate the work of the agencies participating in the efforts to contain COVID-19 and to deal with its effects. However, we have neither seen nor heard any discussion of strategies to deal with anticipated and unexpected challenges encountered by persons with disabilities throughout this public health emergency.

In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published "[Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Capabilities: National Standards for State, Local, Tribal, and Territorial Public Health](#)." This document specifically addresses continuity of operations and states, "Particular attention should be placed on accessibility of health and human services for at-risk individuals with access and functional needs who may be disproportionately impacted by a public health incident." We have seen nothing in the Administration's strategy indicating that continuity of services for Americans with disabilities is being addressed.

The [National Call to Action](#) calls upon emergency and health strategists to address: 1) continuity of services for persons with disabilities who require them for their health and daily functioning; 2) access to actionable information for persons who require accessible forms of communication, including persons with vision or hearing disabilities; intellectual and developmental, autism,

*The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies is the only national organization with a mission of equal access to emergency and disaster programs before, during, and after disasters for people with disabilities. We are the nation's experts on disability rights, accessibility and inclusion throughout all phases of emergency preparedness, disaster operations, and community wide disaster recovery.*

[www.disasterstrategies.org](http://www.disasterstrategies.org)



cognitive, learning, reading and information processing disabilities; 3) ensuring the daily needs of persons with disabilities are met for food, housing, healthcare, and community support, which are provided by personal caregivers or community agencies; 4) how to operationalize the living arrangements throughout quarantines that potentially may be particularly burdensome for persons with disabilities and their families; 5) ensuring equal access to necessary diagnostic tests and protective equipment; and 6) the provision of training for agencies and their employees in their legal obligations with regard to persons with disabilities.

The nation has witnessed the tragedies that COVID-19 can cause in an institutional setting, such as the nursing facility in the State of Washington. While there are thousands of such facilities throughout the country, including facilities serving children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism, psychiatric, or physical disabilities, there are hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities living independently or in small community homes. This reality presents an even greater task of ensuring they have the support needed, and access to information and resources to survive this crisis. We are particularly concerned for the health and safety of these citizens should their support staff and personal assistants become ill or unavailable to continue working. This sector is facing the greatest staffing shortage in our history, and we are deeply concerned that this public health emergency will dramatically exacerbate the workforce crisis.

We ask you and your team to provide us with how the Administration will address the following:

- 1) What are your plans to address providing services to persons with disabilities living in their own home with daily in-home services and supports, should personal assistance providers become infected or decide to not come to work? We cannot emphasize enough the seriousness of this concern.
- 2) What are your plans for ensuring that providers who travel from home to home throughout the day do not expose persons with disabilities to COVID-19 in their home?
- 3) What are your plans to address staffing shortages of social or health service agencies providing services to persons with disabilities should staff become infected or decide to not come to work? We cannot emphasize enough the seriousness of this concern.

*The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies is the only national organization with a mission of equal access to emergency and disaster programs before, during, and after disasters for people with disabilities. We are the nation's experts on disability rights, accessibility and inclusion throughout all phases of emergency preparedness, disaster operations, and community wide disaster recovery.*

[www.disasterstrategies.org](http://www.disasterstrategies.org)



4) What are your plans if an individual in a group facility for persons with disabilities is identified as having COVID-19? What guidance will be provided to minimize infection of others? What are your plans if the staff of the facility becomes ill and doesn't come to work?

5) What are your plans for training the employees of community living facilities regarding COVID-19?

6) What are your plans to communicate emergency information to people who are blind or deaf, or who otherwise need individualized types of communications?

We have not seen any statement by your office or the involved agencies to ensure these and related questions are being asked, much less answered. We stand ready to assist in identifying experts in planning for and responding to the public health emergency needs of persons with disabilities who can recommend possible solutions to you and the relevant agencies working on these issues. We appreciate your attention to this request and the National Call to Action.

Please feel free to contact any of the following individuals listed below

**Germán Parodi & Shaylin Sluzalis**, Co-Executive Directors of

[The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies](https://www.disasterstrategies.org)

dart@disasterstrategies.org (215) 971-0660 or (570) 777-0268

**Marcie Roth**, Executive Director & CEO of [World Institute on Disability](https://www.wid.org)

marcie@wid.org (301) 717-7447

**Todd Holloway**, Chair of [National Council on Independent Living Emergency Preparedness](https://www.fisouth.org)

[Subcommittee](https://www.fisouth.org)

toddh@cfisouth.org (253) 830-4279

*The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies is the only national organization with a mission of equal access to emergency and disaster programs before, during, and after disasters for people with disabilities. We are the nation's experts on disability rights, accessibility and inclusion throughout all phases of emergency preparedness, disaster operations, and community wide disaster recovery.*

[www.disasterstrategies.org](https://www.disasterstrategies.org)