

# Needs Assessment Snapshot: The Effects of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing Measures on Staff Who Provide Non-Residential Services to People with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families

## What we did and what we asked:

An on-line survey was sent to Developmental Agencies in Ontario with the request that it be forwarded to staff. The survey was open from April 5 – 22, 2020 and asked about the effects of COVID-19 and physical distancing requirements on people with developmental disabilities, family members and staff working in the sector. One hundred and thirty-seven respondents provided non-residential services, 95% of whom were from the Toronto area. While the results do not necessarily reflect the views of non-residential providers across the province, they do provide important insights into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Developmental Services sector.

## What We Found

Staff providing non-residential services are experiencing significant impacts on their work and themselves:

- 87% reported increased concern for client well-being
- 82% reported an inability to meet client needs
- 79% reported experiencing increased stress and/or anxiety
- 42% reported a fear of contracting COVID-19

## Common Issues

These staff also provided additional comments on how their work has been impacted. Common issues identified were:

- Difficulty or inability to perform their normal job functions due to increased reliance on technology. Often, they themselves or their clients lacked access to needed technology, or did not know how to use it properly
- Additional challenges (and workload) due to working from home and, for many, balancing childcare with work
- A lack of information, for example:
  - Availability of other supports and services for clients and families
  - Protocols and resources to support crisis response
- Many staff also reported worry over potential layoffs and job insecurity.

## What can be done to address the situation now?

Non-residential service providers who responded endorsed several strategies that would be helpful in supporting them:

### Helpful Strategies for Supporting Staff

- Ongoing communication and reassurance from management (84%)
- Receiving up-to-date public health and medical advice (74%)
- Information and resources to minimize risk (72%)
- Tools and resources for on-line privacy (62%)
- Employee Assistance Programs (54%)
- Personal Protective Equipment (43%)

These results, and other suggestions provided by the respondents, were used to create a set of recommendations to aid staff providing non-residential services:

- **IT support**
  - Having the appropriate hardware and software to support clients from home
  - Training in the use of technology
  - Tools to enhance on-line privacy
  - Access to technology, and training in how to use it, for families to receive service
- Regular information and supportive communication from management
- Accommodations for staff at home with children
  - Childcare
  - Flexible work hours
- Communication regarding job security

### Staff Suggested Tools and Resources to Help Support Clients and Families

- Plain Language Resources, Tools, Policies/Procedures, Protocols to help families:
  - Keep clients active
  - Deal with crisis and challenging behaviours
  - Care for clients who have COVID-19
- A Helpline to provide support in:
  - Addressing challenging behaviours
  - Dealing with negative emotions and mental health issues
  - Establishing new routines and activities for clients
  - Planning for a client to go to hospital
  - Finding resources to address challenges people are facing

## What long-term advocacy is required?

Many areas of advocacy that could be undertaken on behalf of people with developmental disabilities and their families are outlined in the full report and in the bulletin titled '*Needs Assessment Snapshot: Perspective of Frontline Staff and Management on the Effects of COVID-19 and Physical Distancing Measures on People with Developmental Disabilities*'. Work on those areas would also be helpful in addressing many of the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on developmental services and its workforce.

**For the full report and other snapshots go to:**

<https://realxchange.communitylivingessex.org/human-resources-and-policies/>



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