



Media Release: New Report Illustrates Why Women* with Disabilities Needed to be Involved in COVID-19 Emergency Planning

A new report released today by Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) analyses the experiences of women, girls, feminine identifying, and non-binary people with disabilities during COVID-19. It illustrates an urgent need to address pre-existing disadvantage, and to involve women* with disabilities in all emergency planning.

Report author Megan Hagan says ‘Findings were disheartening in that nothing was really new, or really COVID-19 specific. Instead, there was a predictable worsening of pre-existing disadvantage.’

78% of women* with disabilities reported experiencing new or increased mental health issues during COVID-19. Of particular concern, 87% of LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities experienced increased mental health concerns. These figures reflect the already high levels of mental health concerns among women* with disability being exacerbated.

28% of women with disability were impacted negatively by increased physical labour. Ms Hagan notes ‘gender inequalities around the mental load, home schooling, and increased domestic work increased barriers for many women* with disabilities.’

The report also acknowledges positive changes brought about by COVID-19. Of note, there were increased social security payments; increased availability of Telehealth appointments; the normalisation of video calls; the ability to work from home; and a greater community awareness of infection control, isolation, and loneliness.

These positive aspects are important to bring forward as we strive for an equitable society, but they in no way balance out the negative impacts.

COVID-19 has resulted in increased domestic violence cases across Australia. Despite the federal government committing additional domestic violence funding, there have not been the resources to meet demand for support services. 12% of women* with disability experienced new or increased domestic violence due to COVID-19.

22.73% of LGBTQI+ people with disability experienced new or increased family or domestic violence during COVID-19 in contrast to 7.25% of cisgender women.

40% of women* with disabilities experiencing family or domestic violence did not have access to appropriate services.

In Australia, compared to their peers, women, girls, feminine identifying, and non-binary people with disabilities experience higher levels of all forms of violence more intensely and frequently and are subjected to such violence by a greater number of perpetrators. COVID-19 exacerbated the situation.

When speaking on the prevention of violence against women* with disabilities in the ACT, WWDACT CEO explains that 'Women* with disabilities experience the same forms of violence that all women* experience, but they also experience forms of violence unique to the intersection of gender and disability.' The prevalence of this violence is testimony to the lack of prevention strategies and pathways safety afforded to women* with disabilities by current policy, services, and systems. On this, Mx Reed notes 'worryingly, our stats do not represent the true extent of this problem'.

The report and a report brief are available at wwdact.org.au/publications

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