

## **Written evidence submitted by the Glasgow Disability Alliance (MRS0352)**

1. Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) is a membership organisation run by and for disabled people.

2. We have over 5000+ members across Greater Glasgow. We are controlled by our Full members: disabled people and disabled people led organisations (DPOs). We also have a thriving network of Associate members: people, partners and allies who support our aims.

3. We are submitting evidence as the largest disabled people's organisation in the UK.

4. 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-19 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.

### **GDA's evidence – April 2020**

**1. How people have been affected by the illness or the response to it**

**2. If there have been specific impacts on people due to them having a protected characteristic**

**5. GDA's evidence to the committee will take question 1 and 2 together as all our members are either disabled or have a long term health condition and therefore our findings are the specific impacts of Covid-19 on people due to them having a protected characteristic.**

6. 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 from 20th March - 27th 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.

7. Through this engagement, GDA members are providing vital evidence of the actions needed to protect disabled people during and after the COVID19 pandemic.

8. Our members' experience make it clear that:

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**4. The COVID-19 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.

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

9.40% of disabled people we have spoken to are worried about food, medication or money.

10. Existing poverty and financial exclusion mean many disabled people have no way to pay bills or buy essentials under lockdown.

11. Many are falling between the cracks, with huge delays in the benefits system.

12. 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.

13. Anonymous quotes from our members, surveyed:

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?

Foodbanks have closed down. I never know how to contact them or get a voucher.

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

14. In the last 5 weeks GDA has provided:

- **Welfare Rights support to 100+ disabled people**
- Urgent essentials provided 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.**

15. Isolation, already twice as high\* amongst disabled people of all ages, is now even more acute. \*(<http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1712/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-scotland-a-review-of-prevalence-and-trends.pdf>)

16. 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.

Anonymous quotes from our members, surveyed:

- 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.

17. The GDA team has had over 3000 conversations, with 2500 people, averaging 250 hours per week, since March 20<sup>th</sup>.

18. Emergency funding secured for a Wellbeing Helpline to enhance this work.

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

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

20. 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.

Anonymous quotes from our members, surveyed:

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.

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

## **2. The Covid-response risks leaving disabled people behind**

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

### **Social Care**

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

24. 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.

Quote: I was told my personal care was 'non-critical' so would be stopping immediately, for the foreseeable

### **Mental Health**

25. 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.

Quote: 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**

26. GDA members fear that 'resource rationing' guidelines are stripping them of their rights to equal access to potentially life-saving treatment.

27. Several individuals have reported feeling pressured into agreeing Do Not Resuscitate notices, or being told they won't be eligible for hospital treatment should they fall ill.

Quote: Some people think if you're in a wheelchair you're wasting people's time and you don't want to live.

Quote: I'm terrified others' lives will be prioritised over mine.

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

**29. 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.**

**Q. Whether there may be unforeseen consequences to measures brought in to ease the burden on frontline staff for example relaxing the measures in the Care Act.**

30.Changes to the responsibilities and legal duties to provide care and support under legislation (the Care Act 2014 in England) introduced by the Coronavirus Bill 2020 must not have an impact upon disabled people's access to the adult social care they need. [BBC Disclosure and Reporting Scotland](#) report that services are being removed from disabled adults, in Glasgow alone adult social care was removed with no notice from 1,884 people since mid-March.

31.Social care support was already underfunded and undervalued before the Covid19 crisis. This legislation - while intended to relieve public services - has perhaps unwittingly undermined disabled people's human rights and has left them isolated and at risk due to removal of the duty to carry out an assessment and/or meet their needs, resulting in some receiving no social care support at all.

May 2020