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## **Despite higher infection rate and fewer resources, service providers for New Yorkers with disabilities mitigate COVID-19 fatality rate**

*Syracuse University study shows higher infection rate in residential programs, compared to general population, but no commensurate fatality rate*

Albany, NY – A new study commends service providers supporting New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) for their response to COVID-19, calls for public data sharing by state health authorities and appropriate resources to support this high-risk population.

While people with I/DD living in residential group homes are more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19 than those without I/DD, the efforts of service provider organizations kept fatality rates from being similarly disproportionate, according to a [new study by researchers from Syracuse University and SUNY Upstate Medical University](#).

“To address this increased risk, it is necessary to ensure that people with IDD and those who provide for their care have access to preventive measures and the resources needed to carry them out,” the study concludes, noting the critical need for adequate funding for staff and access to personal protective equipment. “We urge all actors within the systems that support people with IDD to take the necessary individual and systemic action to ensure their safety during this pandemic.”

Researcher Scott Landes, an author of the study and associate professor of Sociology at Syracuse University’s [Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs](#) and a research affiliate for the [Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion](#), noted that while many people with I/DD have accompanying comorbid diseases, “these severe outcomes may be more related to the current design of the I/DD service system in the United States, in which states rely heavily on providing care in congregate settings with **limited support and resources**.”

“This is proving deadly during the current pandemic,” Landes said.

But not as deadly as it could have been, the study showed.

The study found that individuals with I/DD supported in residential settings were four times as likely to contract COVID-19, and two times as likely to die from the infection than the general population of New York.

“(O)ur assumption is that this higher number of cases did not result in similarly disproportional case-fatality because of, at least partially, if not fully, the efforts of multiple stakeholders – people with IDD, their families, advocacy groups, residential providers, their staff, and healthcare providers – to ensure the best care possible for these individuals,” the authors of the study stated.

“This study underscores the quality of care that volunteer providers have been able to provide despite being abandoned by the state,” said Tom McAlvanah, NYDA President and IAC Executive Director. “We were forced to spend millions of dollars for protective equipment and adequate staffing while the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the state agency charged with advancing supports for this population, does nothing but propose even more cuts to this already fragile system of care. New Yorkers with I/DD are at higher risk, and it is the state’s responsibility to respond to that risk with appropriate resources to protect its vulnerable citizens.”

New York Disabilities Advocates has been collecting data on the impact of COVID-19 on voluntary since early April and provided deidentified data for the study. OPWDD has also been collecting data on state-operated agencies, but has yet to make it publicly available.

This fact was not lost on the researchers, who “commend NYDA for their foresight and commitment to collecting data from their associated organizations.” Due to the increased severity of COVID-19 outcomes among people with IDD found in the study, the authors conclude that: “It is imperative that the entities that provide services for or monitor any segment of this population begin to openly share all relevant data they have on COVID-19 outcomes among people with IDD.”

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#### About New York Disability Advocates

New York Disability Advocates (NYDA) is a statewide coalition of seven non-profit provider associations encompassing more than 300 non-profits agencies providing vital services and support to more than 140,000 New Yorkers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.