



# Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

**June 16, 2020**

## Towards restarting disability supports in Manitoba in the Covid-19 Era



**O**n March 18, Day Support Programs providing supports to persons with intellectual disabilities went in to critical service mode. The move to critical services meant that the majority of Day Program Services were closed in keeping with public health requirements and to keep our most vulnerable populations safe during the Covid-19 pandemic. Day Program Services were made available to those that were deemed as most in need. People with intellectual disabilities also live disproportionately in poverty and were reliant on public services that were reduced

or shut down by COVID such as transit, recreation facilities, libraries and food banks.

Prior to the pandemic, Community Living Disability Services (CLDS), funded by the provincial Department of Families, supported the participation of 3865 individuals in day programs out of a total caseload of 6878<sup>1</sup>. The traditional day program has served as a stop gap social connection measure for people with intellectual disabilities which typically occurred in segregated settings. In segregated settings people living with

there is an alternative.

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intellectual disabilities often participated in menial tasks which often did not often expose supported individuals to people of all abilities.

When the pandemic was declared, most programs closed down, which left a gap in support for vulnerable people with intellectual disabilities, especially for those who live independently in the community. Physical distancing was not an option for the majority of people with disabilities who live disproportionately in poverty. With Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) rates being inadequate at \$1,033/ month, many people with disabilities have not been able to afford the technology to access critical mental health supports which are available online during COVID.

People living with disabilities have also had difficulty purchasing healthy food and cleaning supplies due to inadequate social assistance rates.

As we see the reopening of the different phases of our economy Day Program Services must take into account the lived experience of people with intellectual disabilities and the new reality that exist due to the COVID-19 especially. One of the supported individuals that I work with lives in the inner-city, lacks close family and is dependent on EIA for his daily survival. His life is already isolated due to inadequate EIA rates which, limits his options to participate in society. Without day programming this supported individuals' life would be even more isolated from society than he currently is.

In order for reopening to happen, Day Programs must start making some critical changes so that there can be a focus on the social connection of people with intellectual disabilities in the broader community. Day Programs must be part of a broader discussion that focuses on the social inclusion of people living with intellectual disabilities into the broader community. Programming must be designed so that people with intellectual disabilities can participate in the society with others regardless of ability and socioeconomic status in community initiatives and events. When

this discussion starts to happen then as society we will be on the road towards inclusion for everyone in our community.

*Carlos Sosa is Direct Support Professional and Disability Advocate*

<sup>1</sup>Manitoba Families (2019) Annual Report 2018-2019 accessed from [https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/about/pubs/fsar\\_2018-2019](https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/about/pubs/fsar_2018-2019).