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New Survey Shows Californians with Disabilities Suffer Disproportionately Negative Impacts from COVID-19 with Disturbing Disparities among Racial and Ethnic Minorities and Overt Discrimination

Los Angeles, CA - A new statewide survey released today, Wednesday, May 27, shows that Californians with disabilities suffer disproportionately negative impacts from COVID-19, with disturbing disparities among racial and ethnic minorities and overt discrimination. The survey, commissioned by Disability Voices United, details how some of the people most vulnerable to COVID-19 health risks are falling through the cracks – putting their health, safety and future at risk.

“The coronavirus pandemic is difficult for everyone, but for many people with disabilities, COVID-19 has led to a complete breakdown of their necessary supports and education - disproportionately hitting racial and ethnic minorities the hardest,” said Judy Mark, the founder of Disability Voices United, UCLA professor, and parent of an autistic son.

“We are creating a situation that will have long-term consequences for people with disabilities and society as a whole. We have let people with disabilities down during the worst crisis in our lifetime. We need to do better.”

The survey was conducted from April 10 - May 18 and shows how the health and safety of people with developmental disabilities are being jeopardized - with safety nets evaporating and fewer resources available to provide stable and secure environments. Spanish speaking Latinos were twice as likely to be denied needed services while Asian-Pacific Islanders reported discrimination rates of 40%.

“We’ve experienced discrimination in the past, but this pandemic has taken it to a more dangerous level and created new barriers to receiving services,” said Cathay Liu, a Chinese-American single mother with a son and daughter who both have developmental disabilities. “People are understandably afraid of getting the virus, but some are inappropriately targeting Chinese-Americans in the process. Unfortunately, I’m not surprised, but my family is suffering.”

Falling Through the Cracks:

- 40% of survey respondents reported asking their state-funded regional center for additional services to help cope with COVID-19, yet **almost half were either denied services or didn’t get a response**. These services include having an aide in the home to assist with basic health and safety, personal care/bathing and respite for the parent.
- Ethnic and racial minorities are disproportionately impacted - particularly **Spanish-speaking Latinos – who were twice as likely to report that their needs are not being met by regional centers during COVID-19**.

- Almost half of the respondents who have a child in special education report that **they are not receiving education since schools have closed.**
- 30% of students who are non-speaking and use technology to communicate also report not being able to participate in their educational program because of lack of support.
- Many respondents do not even have basic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), in the home, especially Latinos who report **just 51% have necessary masks and gloves.**

Even though many services and supplies are limited, the Disability Voices United survey found that taxpayers dollars are still being wasted and spent on “services” that are not being delivered during COVID-19.

- More than 90% of day programs for people with disabilities are now closed.
- Still, California continues to pay for the closed day programs.
- Program providers are supposed to offer modified services during the pandemic, but 51% of survey respondents who previously attended day programs say they are now **receiving no services from these programs, despite the fact California has continued to pay for them, wasting precious financial resources.**

“Some of our state-funded systems are falling gravely short, while people with disabilities are in even greater need,” Judy Mark added. “Many individuals with disabilities were struggling before the pandemic, and this survey shows how they are now teetering on the edge. These programs need to be stepping up right now, not pulling back.”

About Disability Voices United

Disability Voices United is a statewide advocacy organization exclusively directed by and for individuals with developmental disabilities and our families. We advocate for choice and control over our lives, meaningful outcomes that matter to us, and systems that are equitable and accountable to us. DVU can provide interviews with individuals with developmental disabilities and families to speak in English and Spanish about the devastating personal impact of COVID-19. DisabilityVoicesUnited.org

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