

**“EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED SINCE COVID”: ONGOING CHALLENGES FACED BY
CANADIAN ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES
DURING WAVES 2 AND 3 OF THE PANDEMIC**

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Objectives

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have unique, unmet needs that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic due to restrictions. People are now unable to engage in activities they used to do and for many, it is hard to adjust to virtual programming. A new reliance on technology, inability to socialize like they were used to, and confusion regarding COVID-19 restrictions are all challenges this population face. To support the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals with IDD, a virtual course was designed to teach practical skills and share tools to help people with IDD to build their capacity to manage mental health concerns. The course was co-led by self-advocate leaders, and topics included Healthcare Communication and Taking Care of Yourself.

The purpose of this secondary analysis was to evaluate feedback from the course to gain insight into what challenges participants experienced after course completion and how COVID-19 restrictions influenced their wellbeing in waves 2 and 3 of the pandemic.

Methods

Two 6-week virtual courses were held for adults with IDD across Canada in the Fall of 2020 and Winter of 2021. 25 participants were interviewed 6-8 weeks following course completion and asked:

- Please tell us about any issues or things that are difficult for you right now
- Please tell us how COVID-19 restrictions where you live have affected you since you began the course

Their open-ended responses were transcribed and qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results

We identified 3 themes related to challenges self-advocates continue to face beyond the course: 1) Finances, 2) Restrictions, and 3) Vaccines. Responses varied slightly according which course cycle participants were in.

Finances: Self-advocates struggled with finding and maintaining employment and getting by with the amount of government disability funding, expressing how the pandemic has exacerbated their financial insecurity.

Restrictions: COVID-19 restrictions affected multiple dimensions of self-advocates' lives. They experienced confusion with changing public health directives, difficulty adjusting to disruptions to their daily social activities, and faced challenges in attending healthcare appointments.

Vaccines: Self-advocates looked forward to receiving their vaccine but were confused about when and where to get it. In cycle 1, they were frustrated about not being a priority population for vaccines. By cycle 2, some participants had received their vaccine but were still anxious about what would happen next.

Discussion/Conclusions

While course resources and tools helped them navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, they continued experiencing challenges. The issues identified by participants echo previous studies highlighting similar struggles self-advocates experienced worldwide during the pandemic, especially in waves 2 and 3. These findings will help us better understand the unique ways the pandemic has affected the wellbeing of people with IDD and improve how we support this population. The findings also demonstrate the importance of considering broader social determinants of health on the wellbeing of self-advocates when delivering services and how these continue to affect them beyond the scope and duration of such interventions. Our sample is small and may not represent the experiences of people with more profound disabilities.

Format

Parts of this poster will be designed to be accessible to a lay audience and people with developmental disabilities (i.e., plain language, image use).