

**Sunflower Health Plan and National Council on Independent Living Provider Accessibility Initiative
COVID-19 Web Series, Episode #2:**

“Essential Services: Maintaining Access to Personal Attendants during the COVID-19 Epidemic”

QUICK TIP SHEET

Is social distancing and social isolation realistic for people with disabilities that use personal attendants?

- People with disabilities using personal assistants cannot isolate. Encouraging personal attendants to isolate from their clients/consumers can increase risk to the clients/ consumers, as they may seek out alternative attendants who are not as familiar with their care needs.
- Personal attendant agencies should provide relevant and informative resources to support a healthy workspace for clients/consumers and attendants, disrupting their care routines as little as possible.

How can in-home care agencies empower clients/consumers to protect themselves and their personal assistants?

- Educate clients/consumers about personal safety best practices. Encourage them to engage in the management of their services to ensure that all involved are using safe practices. Provide resources to support them in a very concrete and meaningful way.
- Both agencies and consumers/clients should set expectations with attendants to frequently wash their hands, clean high-touch surfaces (including cell phones, doorknobs, microwave handles, fridge handles, etc.) and practice other hygienic best practices.
- Have a back-up plan. For example, if an attendant gets sick, they need to have somebody on call to cover their services. This plan should be set up well before a crisis situation. Not having an attendant present could be very dangerous for some consumers/clients.
- Work to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for consumers/clients who self-direct their personal attendant services and workers. Educate personal attendants on the warning signs of COVID-related health concerns.
- Reach out to consumers/clients and attendants on a routine basis. Understand that even when there are shelter-in-place orders, attendants are considered “essential workers.”

What specific policy changes could help improve the situation for people with disabilities, their personal attendants, and in-home care agencies?

- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) should issue guidance around in-home services - and self-directed in-home services in particular.
- Congress should allocate dedicated funding to address the personal attendant needs of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 epidemic, including but not limited to:
 - Funding for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for personal attendant consumers/clients, for personal attendants, and for other LTSS vendors such as transportation vendors.
 - Funding to create a workforce infrastructure that recruits and provides workers to serve as Emergency Personal Attendants for people with disabilities who test positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms and no alternative means of support.
 - Additional pay for personal attendants with additional Medicaid resources and actuarially sound rates, including:
 - Hazard pay to incent Emergency Personal Attendants, specialized training for those workers, and funds for hazardous cleaning services/sterilization of the client/consumer’s home.
 - Overtime pay to allow one designated personal attendant instead of multiple attendants, reducing exposure for both the workers and clients/consumers.
 - Paid sick leave for personal attendants that work for large employers (over 500 employees).