

**Sunflower Health Plan and National Council on Independent Living
Provider Accessibility Initiative COVID-19 Web Series, Episode #1:
“COVID-19 and People with Disabilities”**

QUICK TIP SHEET

What’s the most important thing doctors and providers can do right away to improve healthcare access for people with disabilities during the COVID-19 epidemic?

- **Use telehealth** whenever possible and **provide 60 days allowance for prescriptions.**
 - Transportation may be more challenging during these times.
- **Consider the needs of people with disabilities in medical facility and emergency public health planning.**
 - Accessible technology and durable medical equipment should be available for people with disabilities in all medical facilities responding to the COVID-19 surge.
 - Wi-Fi access is necessary for individuals with disabilities to use accessible technologies. However, please offer additional communication methods for those with disabilities who do not have access to smartphones or accessible technologies.
- **Avoid judging the quality of people’s lives based on a pre-existing disability** when making treatment decisions around COVID-19. It’s prohibited. ([OCR March 28, 2020 Bulletin](#))
- **Talk with patients/consumers that use personal attendants or direct service professionals** about available durable medical equipment options that could help them gain additional independence and reduce the need for close contact with workers in their home.
- **Account for unique telehealth access issues for people with disabilities:**
 - **Choose a safe environment for conducting telehealth appointments so no mask will be necessary.** A mask obscures your face and makes it more difficult for an ASL interpreter to clearly hear and interpret messages. It also removes important facial cues for interpreters and patients/consumers who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 - **Say “yes” or “no” instead of nodding** and describe anything that is visually communicated. People who are blind or low vision rely on what they hear and cannot see nonverbal cues, facial expressions, or if someone comes into or out of the room.
 - **Make sure your telehealth platform works with any assistive communication device** your patient/consumer with a disability is using. If it is not compatible, try switching to a phone call or finding another community resource to help with the communication.
- **When cancelling reoccurring appointments, services or procedures, remember:**
 - It’s important to take your patients/consumers’ concerns seriously. People with disabilities know their own bodies, even if similar complaints in non-disabled patients might not typically be concerning. As there is still much unknown about this pandemic, including when shelter-in-place advisories will be lifted, setting check-ins and concrete timelines can help patients/consumers with disabilities feel more engaged and informed while waiting for in-person treatments or appointments.
 - Decisions about appointments should be considered on an individual bases with the input of the person with a disability, while operating within the policies of each health system.