

The Living Declaration aims to raise awareness about the challenges facing people with disabilities / disabled people under Covid-19 and beyond

An international community of disability activists, artists, doctors, scientists and citizens are behind the initiative, which aims to raise awareness and points to solutions for people with disabilities / disabled people - who experience a lack of equal rights under the Covid-19 crisis.

Almost everyone has experienced the isolation, anxiety, and loneliness under the Covid-19 virus – as nations and societies have been shut down for extended periods. While nations and societies are now slowly beginning to open-up again, for many disabled people/people with disabilities the challenges are still very real.

The consequences of Covid-19 for people with disabilities / disabled people are broad. In some countries, access to basic healthcare – and other essentials like water, food and safety – are not available for people with disabilities / disabled people. In other countries, people with disabilities / disabled people face a lack of communication and economic support. The overall consequences for people with disabilities / disabled people stem from the fact that they do not share equal rights and access to essential needs - under Covid-19 and beyond.

Across the world, 15% of the population lives with a disability and persons with disabilities / disabled people generally have more healthcare needs than others, as highlighted by the UN. Among different 43 countries, 42% of persons with disabilities / disabled people perceive their health as poor - versus 6% of non-disabled / able-bodied people. If governments and communities do not raise awareness and act now, the current crisis will continue and can have catastrophic health and socioeconomic consequences for people with disabilities / disabled people in the months and years ahead.

The Living Declaration is about human rights

As a response to the lack of awareness and action from nations and governments across the world, a global community of activists, artists, doctors, scientists and citizens from across four continents drafted The Living Declaration. It is a collective statement and global call to action, drafted by an international community under the organization of Enactlab – a knowledge lab based in Copenhagen, Denmark.

“The Living Declaration is about human rights. The articles in the declaration highlight some of the challenges, inequalities and potential solutions regarding people with disabilities/disabled people during the Covid-19 crisis and beyond”, say the co-founders of Enactlab - Jacob Nossell, an award-winning disability activist and journalist, and Daniel Oxenhandler, Head of Culture for the Enactlab. They add:

“We wanted to build a platform for our community, where different voices of people with disabilities/disabled people can be heard from across the globe. The Living Declaration is meant to serve as a foundation for building international solidarity and collaboration, that can catalyze change and action in local communities.”

When it comes to people with disabilities / disabled people, the need for basic human rights is striking, says Marlene le Roux, one of the initiators and co-authors of The Living Declaration and Member of the South Africa Presidential Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities:

“The low quality or inaccessibility of healthcare has a greater impact on people with disabilities than others. Many people here in Africa cannot afford basic healthcare. Therefore, I would like to call to all of us to protect the lives of people with disabilities. Nothing about us – without us.”

Marlene le Roux explains that many people with disabilities / disabled people are living in isolation and are heavily dependent on social workers, that they simply cannot afford. She calls for more resources to help the vulnerable through the crisis.

Covid-19 is not an equalizer – it is a revealer

Across society, from healthcare and beyond, people with disabilities / disabled people face a lack of equity and equal rights. Rishi Goyal, co-author of the Living Declaration, Director of the Medicine, Literature & Society program and Assistant Professor of Emergency Medicine at Columbia University Medical Center, currently works in the emergency rooms in the Corona epicenter of New York City, where he has seen firsthand the inequalities of the healthcare system:

“The virus reveals something we already know - that the poor, the disabled, people of color are disproportionately affected and are suffering. Already, the mortality and infection rate is higher in those marginalized populations. Covid-19 is not a great equalizer – it is a revealer.”

Rishi Goyal points out that now is the time to reinforce healthcare structures that serve and protect our most vulnerable members in the society. He also wants to reaffirm the need for a strong commitment to scientific discourse and consensus, while reconciling it with the expertise of lived experience.

We will not be sidelined again

In London, UK, another disability activist is experiencing first-hand the challenges facing people with disabilities / disabled people during the crisis. The Artistic Director & CEO of The Graeae Theatre, and co-author of The Living Declaration, Jenny Sealey MBE also sees the Covid-19 as a revealer of the lack of equity and equal rights for people with disabilities / disabled people:

“Historically, we have been sidelined and this Covid-19 pandemic shows us that we are easily forgotten in the time of crisis. We will not tolerate this any longer. We must use this time and declaration to remember that in many cases, people with disabilities and disabled are even more affected by the Covid-19 crisis.”

Jenny Sealey also emphasizes that we must reaffirm to the non-disabled that the deaf and people with disabilities / disabled people have equal human rights. She believes the Living Declaration can serve as a powerful affirmation and call-to-action in this moment of crisis and beyond.

Global Collaboration, Local Action

Ultimately, the Living Declaration is meant to serve as a catalyst to create an international dialogue and community around disability, equity and human rights – combining global collaboration with local action. People around the world can sign the declaration, contribute their own ideas, and adapt and evolve the Living Declaration to enact and drive action in their own communities.

Facts:

The Living Declaration of Disability, Resilience and Equity aims to bring awareness about and for people with disabilities / disabled people under Covid-19. Many people with disabilities / disabled people have different and special needs under Covid-19. The Living Declaration points to the challenges and potential solutions for people with disabilities / disabled people under this crisis. It is also a truly living document – where people are encouraged to add ideas, adapt and evolve the declaration for use in their own communities. www.thelivingdeclaration.org

Enactlab is an international knowledge lab, combining the lived experience of people and society with the methods of the Enact Model in order to enact meaningful change and agency. www.enactlab.com

Further reading:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/covid-19.html>

<https://www.who.int/who-documents-detail/disability-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>

https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/en/

Additional Quotes from the co-authors of The Living Declaration:

“There has never been a better time to set out a new program for people with disabilities. Through Enactlab and the Living Declaration, we call upon our leaders to be mindful of our needs and include us in the new, evolving world.”

Hillary Lane – co-author of the Living Declaration and coordinator of AfriNEAD, the African Network for Evidence to Action in Disability

“Vulnerable populations in our communities are being affected and dying in disproportionate numbers as the pandemic carries on, and we urgently need solutions to create more equitable public health systems. The declaration is meant to spark urgent debate and action around constructive solutions to protect these vulnerable populations – from policy change to community health practices and pedagogies which promote autonomy and a culture of solidarity and cooperation.”

Vitor Pordeus – co-author of the Living Declaration, transcultural community psychiatrist and theatre actor from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

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