

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities struggled with mental health during COVID lockdowns

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People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) struggled with their mental health during the COVID-19-induced lockdowns and

subsequent restraints on community services, according to a new study published today in *Psychiatric Services*.

Researchers evaluated nationwide survey data and found the most significant stressors were loss of access to programs and activities, such as volunteering and jobs, that provide opportunities to socialize.

"Individuals who filled out the survey consistently indicated that access to exercise, access to the outdoors, to time with friends and family are things that would help enhance [behavioral health](#)," says Jessica Sanders, MD, lead author and assistant professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. "Ranking these things higher or as high as access to [behavioral therapy](#) means that it's as important to them."

Researchers created a survey aiming to gauge changes in life for individuals with IDD during COVID-19 by asking about loss of access to programs and services as well as what would help them. 437 people from 32 states responded. 84% of responses were filled out by a caregiver, and 35% of respondents are pediatric.

52% of respondents reported worsened [mental health](#) which correlated with loss of access to services and activities. Additionally, the lack of community support that came with canceled services and activities correlated with worse sleep, more [screen time](#) and requiring more assistance in [daily life](#) with things like bathing or dressing.

Sanders says these results can help indicate the communal need to offer individuals with IDD access to services and programs that provide routine and opportunity to socialize.

"We as doctors can do all we want and all we can to help manage medication and appointments, but the difference that affected everyone in this pandemic is loss off access to [community services](#). We really

hope that this can promote policy decisions to always keep these services and their impact on community members with IDD in mind."

More information: Jessica Solomon Sanders et al, Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Behavioral Health of People With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, *Psychiatric Services* (2022). DOI: [10.1176/appi.ps.202100524](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.202100524)

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