

Advocacy actions you and your church can take to ensure health care access during the COVID-19 health crisis

Note - these are steps that all of us, people with and without disabilities, can take to come alongside each other.



First steps

- Review ¶162 in the United Methodist Social Principles.ⁱ The introduction states “We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection.” See also #3201 in the *Book of Resolutions*.ⁱⁱ
- Educate yourself. Research county and state, and federal guidelines in case of health crisis and any applicable laws that pertain to non-discrimination for health care and other services. Start with the [Bulletin: Civil Rights, HIPAA, and the Coronavirus Disease](#)ⁱⁱⁱ from the HHS Office for Civil Rights in Action. Learn the impact of ableism^{iv} on triage decisions.
- Research local resources available to assist persons with disabilities and families.

In your congregation

- Identify a point person to direct any outreach, e.g. a parish nurse or disability ministry coordinator, or other staff or trained volunteers such as Stephen Ministers.
- Consider assigning designated liaisons to church members who have disabilities and family members with disabilities. Reach out and listen to the stated concerns and needs before determining ways the church can come alongside these members.
- Offer to help people prepare to access medical care and provide support if needed, e.g. know back-up caregiver options, stay available to research information.
- Pray for calm minds and spirits in the midst of anxiety-inducing circumstances.

In your community and beyond

- Write to government officials, challenging discriminatory guidelines or encouraging government to develop non-discriminatory guidelines for critical care and medication access^v and for inclusion in stimulus funding packages. The [Joint Position Statement on the Right to Equal Access to Medical Treatment](#)^{vi} is a good starting point.
- Support paid leave and health protection for caregivers, who are essential!
- Remind the authorities who are setting up shelters and non-traditional hospitals of the need to ensure accessibility at the sites.
- Publicize the [Bulletin](#) through your social media, conference mailings, letters to the editor, and other means. Suggest that vulnerable people carry the document with them when seeking health care.
- Learn about measures being proposed to implement gradual return to activity in your area, and advocate to ensure that the measures do not discriminate against people with disabilities.

For the most current resources, follow the [DMC Facebook Page](#) and refer to the web article [Coronavirus Resources for Churches](#) which will be updated frequently with new information.

ⁱ The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church (2016). Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, p.119. See also Paragraph 162V, pp. 129-130.

ⁱⁱ The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church (2016). Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, pp. 237-245.

ⁱⁱⁱ HHS Office for Civil Rights in Action. “Bulletin: Civil Rights, HIPAA, and the Coronavirus 2019,” March 28, 2020. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr-bulletin-3-28-20.pdf>.

^{iv} See Dingle, Shannon. *Sojourners*. “Coronavirus crisis exposes society’s casual ableism,” March 23, 2020. https://sojo.net/articles/coronavirus-crisis-exposes-societys-casual-ableism?fbclid=IwAR3xEn2Wu9ajUaNBCiJ30U_fvZvSIO_FogfwXHZt0fryoz1a8GfdiTJ_cU0

See also Ladau, Emily. *HuffPost*. “As a disabled person, I’m afraid I may not be deemed worth saving from the coronavirus,” March 25, 2020. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coronavirus-healthcare-rationing-medical-ethics-disability_n_5e7a2b0dc5b6f5b7c54bb117?ncid=engmodushpmsg00000003&fbclid=IwAR2Dfr7o6-j1ETQsfFy_oKQTIGYjo_DAj1WMWq9fntf8W428IKBiswfvPjw

See also Powell, Robin. *The Appeal*. “Coronavirus pandemic has brought out society’s alarming disregard for people with disabilities,” March 25, 2020. <https://theappeal.org/coronavirus-disabilities/>

For a more global perspective, see Devandas, Catalina. United Nations Human Rights. “COVID-19: Who is protecting the people with disabilities?” March 17, 2020. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25725&LangID=E>

^v Ne’eman, Ari, & Albrecht, Kit. *The Christian Citizen*. “How the disability community can respond to COVID-19: Ensuring people with disabilities can access prescription drugs,” March 17, 2020. <https://christiancitizen.us/how-the-disability-community-can-respond-to-covid-19-ensuring-people-with-disabilities-can-access-prescription-drugs-during-the-current-crisis/>

^{vi} TASH. “Joint Position Statement on the Right to Equal Access to Medical Treatment.” https://tash.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TASH_Statement_on_Human_Rights_and_COVID_19.pdf

See also National Catholic Partnership on Disability, “Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Medical Treatment During the COVID-19 Pandemic” for a their statement and the COVID-19 Medical Treatment Infographic in English and Spanish: <https://ncpd.org/covid-19-resources>.