



Disabled
Children's
Partnership



#LeftInLockdown

The impact of the
COVID-19 pandemic
on disabled children

The Disabled Children's Partnership (DCP) has been regularly interviewing and surveying a panel of 1,200 families with disabled children throughout 2021.

Delays to vital support services

More than

74%

of families stated that they still cannot access pre-pandemic levels of therapies

such as physiotherapy, speech and language therapy or occupational therapy (June 2021).

70%

of families stated that they still cannot access pre-pandemic levels of health services they need.

These could be check-ins with clinicians to manage a child's condition or to review treatments for those with progressive conditions (June 2021).

My child has regressed irretrievably; I despair he will ever be able to catch up.

More than

80%

of families have seen both informal and formal support services

such as from charities and local authorities, cut during the pandemic. This includes short breaks, day care, and residential care (January 2021).

There has been no occupational therapy (OT) support at all since January 2021, even when my child has OT provision on his Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

I am physically and mentally exhausted having looked after my son almost single handedly for such a long time.

Our research shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on disabled children, young people, and their families.

The impact of these delays

As a result of delays to services and continued high levels of social isolation

nearly

3/4

(71%) of disabled children have seen their progress managing their conditions regress

- such as in social communication or their mental health - due to the pandemic. (June 2021).

Parents highlighted a negative impact in hard earned life skills in their disabled child, such as being out and about (53%) communicating with others (49%) and interacting with strangers (47%) (March 2021).

Despite lockdown restrictions easing,

6 in 10

parents and

9 in 10

disabled children are socially isolated.

– rates which are higher than the general population (June 2021).

A staggering

76%

of parents had possible or probable depression.

(June 2021)

“He has developed an agonizing complication condition to his main disability. No specialists have been available to see him.

“I am really concerned that my son has only done around 12 weeks in school in the last year (March to March) and seems to be regressing in some of his learning abilities and behaviours.

Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests

The DCP also sent **FOI requests to every local authority in England and a wide range of NHS health trusts in the first quarter of 2021**, asking about the waiting times for vital disabled children's health and care services, such as Education, Health and Care Plan assessments, physiotherapy, and speech and language therapy.

The results reveal that during the pandemic **more local authorities and NHS trusts have failed to meet their guidelines** for providing support to disabled children and families than before the pandemic, **further contributing to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic** on disabled children and families.

All the stats below are from FOI requests comparing data from during the pandemic (April to December 2020) to before the pandemic (March 2019 to December 2020).

7 in 10
NHS Trusts are failing to meet their targets for providing services for physiotherapy appointments.

50%+

of local authorities have failed to meet their targets for providing vital Education, Health and Care plan assessments for disabled children.

40%

of local authorities have cut respite care in the pandemic – even though disabled children and families are more socially isolated.





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The need for a recovery policies

The DCP is calling for a **COVID-19 recovery policies** for disabled children and families, with ring-fenced funding, to make up for the disproportionate impact they have felt from support services being reduced. This plan should include:

- ☸ Catch-up for missed therapies.
- ☸ Short breaks for families to address high levels of family exhaustion.
- ☸ Additional support for the mental health of disabled children and families.
- ☸ Access to activities to overcome social isolation.

Despite reassurances from the government that support for disabled children should be returning, our research shows that this is not happening fast enough. **We need targeted policies to ensure no disabled child is left behind from the pandemic recovery.**



For more information on the DCP's research and campaigns, please visit:

disabledchildrenpartnership.org.uk

or email us on:

disabledchildren.partnership@mencap.org.uk

Statistics from this briefing are from the DCP reports of surveys of parent carers and our FOI requests from local authorities and NHS trusts - all of which are available to download on our website. <https://disabledchildrenpartnership.org.uk/leftinlockdown/>