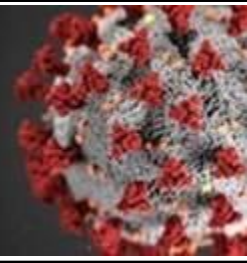




## COVID-19 Update



[ACL.GOV/COVID-19](https://acl.gov/covid-19)

### **New Legal Guidance and Resources to Ensure -- and Expand -- Access to COVID-19 Vaccines for People with Disabilities and Older Adults**

As part of a shared commitment to President Biden's [National Strategy](#) and [Executive Order](#) to ensure an equitable COVID-19 response, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the Administration for Community Living (ACL), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have published several new resources to help states, vaccination providers, and others leading COVID-19 response activities improve access to vaccines for people with disabilities and older adults. These resources clarify legal requirements, illustrate some of the barriers to vaccine access faced by people with disabilities and older people, and provide strategies – and examples of how the aging and disability network can help employ them – to ensure accessibility.

The Office for Civil Rights released [new guidance](#) outlining legal standards under the federal civil rights laws prohibiting disability discrimination and providing concrete examples of the application of the legal standards in the context of COVID-19 vaccine programs and how to implement them. OCR also issued a [fact sheet](#) setting out specific steps that those involved in the planning and distribution of vaccines to combat the COVID-19 pandemic may wish to consider to promote compliance with disability rights laws and provide access to vaccination programs for people with disabilities. Earlier COVID-19 guidance from OCR addressed [civil rights protections prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin](#), and [civil rights of persons with limited English proficiency](#).

“Throughout the pandemic, the Office for Civil Rights has made clear that [civil rights laws remain in effect during emergencies](#),” said Acting OCR Director Robinsue Frohboese. “These long-standing laws require that people with disabilities have equal access to services funded by HHS and today’s guidance, along with other important resources from our HHS partners, will help providers ensure compliance with their obligations to make vaccinations fully accessible at every step in the process – from public education to registration for appointments and vaccine administration.”

The Administration for Community Living has compiled [strategies and best practices](#) for helping people with disabilities and older adults access COVID-19 vaccines. This compendium provides creative approaches to outreach and education, appointment facilitation, ensuring website and vaccination site accessibility, and reaching people who cannot be vaccinated outside of their homes. Also included are examples of how the aging and disability network have collaborated with state agencies at virtually every stage of the vaccination process to ensure access for people with disabilities and older adults.

“Vaccination is critical for people with disabilities and older adults, but many face significant barriers to getting vaccinated,” said Alison Barkoff, Acting Administrator of ACL. “It is crucial that states and local health authorities take affirmative steps to ensure equitable vaccine access to older adults and people with disabilities, particularly those who may face additional barriers due to race, ethnicity, income, language, or other factors. The organizations in the aging and disability network can be invaluable partners in these efforts.”

As trusted members of their communities, the aging and disability network offers unique and specialized knowledge of the needs of the people they serve, as well as established channels for reaching them. Through a [partnership between ACL and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the network will receive nearly \$100 million to assist with scheduling of, and travel, to appointments, direct support services, and more. The grants also will enable the aging and disability network to identify people who cannot travel to vaccination sites and to assist local authorities with improving vaccine access for people with disabilities and older adults. Funding is being distributed now, with initial grants issued last week.

Finally, the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation published [an issue brief](#) on the prevalence and characteristics of older adults who are normally unable to leave home unassisted and for whom leaving the house would take considerable and taxing effort. This will inform the development of interventions to increase vaccination of this population, which has proven challenging to reach thus far.

“Older adults who have difficulty leaving their homes may have a hard time getting to vaccine sites in their communities,” said Rebecca Haffajee, Acting Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. “This brief identifies the characteristics of these individuals, additional challenges they may face when trying to get vaccinated, and what services they use to help communities and providers better target their outreach and in-home vaccination efforts.”

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### **About the HHS Office for Civil Rights**

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces federal civil rights laws, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Privacy, Security, and Breach Notification Rules, and the Patient Safety Act and Rule, which together protect fundamental rights of nondiscrimination and health information privacy. OCR is available to [provide technical assistance](#) on federal civil rights requirements and also [investigates complaints](#) alleging discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to access to vaccines.

### **About the Administration for Community Living**

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) was created around the fundamental principle that older adults and people of all ages with disabilities should be able to live where they choose, with the people they choose, and with the ability to participate fully in their communities. By funding services and supports provided by networks of community-based organizations, and with investments in research, education, and innovation, ACL helps make this principle a reality for millions of Americans. *To learn more about the work ACL and the disability and aging networks are doing to combat the pandemic, visit [ACL's COVID-19 website](#).*

### **About the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)**

The Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) advises the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services on policy development in health, disability, human services, data, and science; and provides advice and analysis on economic policy. The ASPE leads special initiatives; coordinates HHS’ evaluation, research, and demonstration activities; and manages cross-HHS planning activities such as strategic planning, legislative planning, and review of regulations. Integral to this role, the ASPE conducts research and evaluation studies; develops policy analyses; and estimates the cost and benefits of policy alternatives under consideration by HHS or Congress. More about how ASPE is supporting COVID-19 response can be found on the [ASPE website](#).