



Disability
Rights
Oregon

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COVID-19: Oregon failing to report the number of people with disabilities who are being tested, dying, and hospitalized

Testing transparency will guard against discrimination, abuse

Portland, Oregon—In testimony before the state legislature yesterday, Oregon’s leading statewide disability rights organization voiced alarm that the state health department is not reporting data on the number of people with disabilities who are being tested, dying, and hospitalized because of COVID-19. Seven years ago, the Legislature passed a bill directing Oregon Health Authority and the Department of Human Services to improve the collection of information about disability and other demographic categories.

Disability Rights Oregon urged the State to collect and share demographic data on disability and other demographic categories, and, if the State refuses to take those steps, urged the Legislature to require the Oregon Health Authority to act.

“The fact that the Oregon Health Authority is not reporting data about the deaths, infection rates, and testing of people with disabilities is shameful and deeply alarming. It raises real questions about what is being hidden,” said Jake Cornett, Executive Director of Disability Rights Oregon. **“Tracking the impact of COVID-19 on Oregonians with disabilities through clear and accurate data is the only way to know whether people with disabilities are getting access to the same level of testing and treatment as everyone else.”**

In 2013, the Legislature acknowledged the importance of accountability and transparency in health reporting when it passed H.B. 2134 to direct the Oregon Health Authority and the

Department of Human Services to collaborate in standardizing and improving demographic data. This was called REAL-D data collection because it includes information about race, ethnicity, language, and disability.

Yet, seven years later, Oregon Health Authority's public reporting on COVID-19 contains no data by the State on the number of people with disabilities who are being tested, dying, and hospitalized.

Background

On March 31, DRO, the Oregon Self Advocacy Coalition, FACT Oregon, and the ACLU of Oregon sent a letter to Governor Kate Brown, which called for an increase in capacity, transparency, and equal access to state-wide testing and treatment capability by Oregon's public and private labs. The letter said that people living in institutions and correctional facilities should also be given access to testing as needed.

On March 20, DRO, along with [Protection & Advocacy organizations](#) across the country, sent a letter to federal officials that raised concerns about bias against people with disabilities in the distribution and administration of the tests. These organizations, charged with investigating abuse and neglect of people with disabilities, say transparency is necessary to prevent discrimination and investigate abuse and neglect against people with disabilities.

Resources

- [Written testimony to Senate Interim Committee on Human Services by Jake Cornett, Executive Director, Disability Rights Oregon](#) (June 3, 2020)
- [Video Recording of Testimony](#), beginning at (2:00:47) (June 3, 2020)
- [Letter to Governor Kate Brown](#) (March 31, 2020)
- [Letter to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#) (March 20, 2020)

About Disability Rights Oregon

Disability Rights Oregon upholds the civil rights of people with disabilities to live, work, and engage in the community. The nonprofit works to transform systems, policies, and practices to give more people the opportunity to reach their full potential. For more than 40 years, the organization has served as Oregon's Protection & Advocacy system.