



September 21, 2020

Dear Colleague:

I am writing to you in my role as President of the Board of AAIDD. My time on the Board has been marked by several dramatic and unanticipated events. From the COVID-19 pandemic to the killings of people of color to natural disasters, such as wildfires in the West and hurricanes in the Southeast, we and AAIDD have been tested in unprecedented ways. Over the next several months, I will write to you about the impacts on, and responses of, AAIDD to these events; however, I want to focus this letter on the pandemic.

All of us have been impacted by the pandemic. Many have lost jobs, businesses, and health insurance. Many have lost loved ones and under circumstances that prevented a proper goodbye or the provision of comfort. Some have had to care for seriously ill friends and relatives, putting their own health at risk. We all have been socially isolated, unable to travel to see family or celebrate important milestones and working from home with a computer screen as our only means of social interaction. Parents are struggling to balance the need to keep their children safe while ensuring access to educational opportunities. And the end, seems very far off.

Of course, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have also been affected by the pandemic, and it appears disproportionately so. Dr. John Constantino at Washington University in St. Louis and the directors of the NIH-funded Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Centers have enumerated many of these impacts.<sup>1</sup> They note that many individuals with IDD have lost direct care support and access to necessary therapies. On-line schooling, while well-intentioned and often necessary to maintain physical health, has often been inaccessible or not adequately individualized for students with IDD. The participation of individuals with IDD in their communities has been severely limited by shelter-in-place orders and the requirements of social distancing. Employment for individuals with IDD has been adversely affected by the need for limiting social contacts with job coaches and a reduction in public transportation in many communities. And the risk of COVID-19 complications among individuals with IDD is particularly high in part because of comorbid health problems but also because of a lack of access to adequate health care. And lastly, Constantino et al. point out that the impacts of the pandemic on local, state, and federal budgets will be profound and long-lasting, and there is a concern that cuts in services to individuals with IDD may be deep and devastating.

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<sup>1</sup> Constantino, JN et al. The impact of covid-19 on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities: Clinical and scientific priorities. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2020 Aug 28;appiajp202020060780. doi: 10.1176/appi.aip.2020.20060780. Online ahead of print.

AAIDD, as a leader in advocating for people with IDD and in supporting the interdisciplinary professionals on whom they depend, has adapted to the pandemic in ways that ensure it continues to fulfill its mission. For example, although the 2020 convention was cancelled, AAIDD provided web-based versions of many of the scheduled talks and presentations. As another example, AAIDD recognized the need to continue providing training for users of the Supports Intensity Scale, and quickly pivoted from in-person to online trainings. The organization is continuing to partner with other relevant organizations to monitor and shape legislation and policies that will affect individuals with IDD now and in the post-pandemic future, such as ensuring access to affordable internet.

In that vein, the AAIDD Board has prepared a survey that you will receive electronically in the next few days. The survey is designed to understand more fully the impacts of the pandemic on AAIDD members. Your responses will help us to continue tailoring our resources and services in ways that are maximally supportive of our membership. So, please consider completing the anonymous survey when it arrives.

I wish you all the best in these difficult times. Serving you and AAIDD is a privilege and honor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leonard Abbeduto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leonard Abbeduto, PhD, FAAIDD