

CENTER COVID RESPONSE & RECOVERY BRIEF: **STATE AND TERRITORY AT PROGRAMS RESPOND TO THE COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on vulnerable populations, including older Americans, those with underlying health conditions, persons with disabilities of all ages, and especially persons receiving or providing long-term care services and supports. **In response, State and Territory AT Programs are playing an increasingly vital role in this public health crisis.**



As individuals with disabilities, seniors, families, and caregivers across the country are signing up for vaccinations to protect themselves and prevent the spread of the virus, **AT Programs are pivoting to provide services, equipment, and expertise to help vaccine dissemination reach those most at risk.**

Assistive Technology Act Programs report a range of developing and ongoing activities to support an accessible and welcoming vaccination process. These include:

- Disseminating up-to-date information on where to go to be vaccinated and ensuring document accessibility.
- Assisting with website accessibility remediation, so that vaccine registration is navigable by persons with cognitive and/or sensory disabilities.
- Advising on the use of assistive technology at mass vaccination sites.
- Providing assistive technology to mass vaccination sites.
- Conducting onsite reviews and accessibility checks at vaccination sites.
- Working directly with providers of vaccine distribution.

California:

Ability Tools works closely with CA's Governor's Office of Emergency Services and a year ago began providing PPE through its network of AT and Independent Living Centers. Since then, the program has joined the state's task force on vaccines to advise on website accessibility remediation as well as integrating accommodations questions into the MyTurn registration system. MyTurn is now accessible and increasingly adopted beyond California. Ability Tools is also hosting pop-up vaccination sites, which began as a pilot that FEMA has since identified as establishing best practices (for integrating accessible seating, assistive technology, accessible information, ASL, and additional interpreters). Christina Mills, Ability Tools Director, reports, "Everyone who comes to be vaccinated goes home with a goody bag with information about our full range of disability services as well as PPE." The program is about to launch a vaccine consumer toolkit in English and Spanish that will be disseminated among disability organizations statewide.

AT reuse programs—an activity of all State and Territory AT Programs—are providing rollators and wheelchairs to improve stamina for those having to wait in line for extended periods. AT toolkits, assembled for use at emergency shelters, are playing a dual purpose among some states, additionally supplying needed AT to mass vaccination sites.

Pennsylvania:

"In Philadelphia, we are offering support to vaccine providers to make assistive technology available at the sites, such as tablets with speech-to-text and translation apps, large print and audio files of information. We're also providing tools to address injection fear and how to use them."

Guam:

"We are currently working on printing plain language material for individuals with disabilities regarding what to expect when getting the COVID-19 vaccination as well as working with our Department of Integrated Services for Individuals with Disabilities (DISID), the Guam Developmental Disabilities Council (GDDC), Guam Legal Services, and the Division of Senior Citizens to assist us with the dissemination."

Maryland:

"We are reviewing all vaccine roll out websites, as well as the contact tracing app, and supporting remediation and alternate formats for documents available at mass vaccination sites. We're also working with the Maryland Department of Disabilities Emergency Preparedness Director to identify the appropriate accommodations at vaccine sites."



A pop-up vaccination site in California.

North Carolina:

The NC AT program began working on COVID-19 response a year ago, providing technical assistance to DHHS on state website accessibility for COVID-19 information. The program's work has since expanded to engage private health systems to remediate the accessibility of vaccine registration sites and working with the Department of Public Health and other state agencies on guidance to providers (private, state, and federal) on the physical accessibility of vaccination sites and the vaccination process. The program is loaning assistive technology for use at vaccination sites, such as iPads with communication apps, low-tech medical communication boards, magnifiers, and manual wheelchairs, as well as coordinating onsite accessibility reviews. "I anticipate the role of AT will continue stepping up as we move into vaccinating Group 4 in North Carolina," reports Tammy Koger, Director of the NC Assistive Technology Program. "North Carolina is looking at different options for continuing to serve those historically marginalized as we reach out to high-risk at-home populations. We're teaming across state agencies that serve individuals with disabilities and seniors; those conversations are going on right now. It's a dynamic situation, but everyone is learning to do this at the same time, and everyone is working great together."

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