



Pharmacy and Vaccine Provider Obligations

Older Adults and People
with Disabilities

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DVAO

DISABILITY VACCINE ACCESS
OPPORTUNITIES CENTER

Introduction

This document provides guidance to pharmacies and other healthcare providers related to administering vaccines and general accessibility requirements under applicable federal and state laws.

Obligations of Vaccine Providers

Ensuring equitable access is the responsibility of vaccine providers. It is the provider's obligation to make certain that older adults and people with disabilities can be properly served upon arrival at your facility to receive a vaccination, including the COVID-19 vaccine. Be prepared and be ready to accommodate their needs upon request. Below you will find guidance and resources on how to better prepare and meet these obligations.

Use a Patient-Driven Approach

It is imperative that individuals with disabilities make their own decisions when accessing and maintaining their healthcare. The person with a disability should be given opportunities to express their needs and wants concerning their vaccination status. The individual should be allowed to express ideas, thoughts and suggestions for what would best assist them. Listen to the individual.

Obligations as a Healthcare Provider

Healthcare providers have requirements under federal disability rights laws to ensure equitable access to healthcare for people with disabilities. Healthcare facilities that must meet the requirements include, but are not limited to: hospitals, doctors' offices, pharmacies, dentists' offices, acupuncturists' offices, etc. These laws include:

- **[Title II of the Americans with Disability Act \(ADA\)](#)** prohibits discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities in all programs, activities, and services of public entities. This includes all state and local health departments. This also includes all state executive agencies, courts, legislatures, towns, cities, counties, school districts, universities, community colleges, water districts, special purpose districts, regional transit authorities, and other state and local government instrumentalities.
- **[Title III of the ADA](#)** ensures that people with disabilities are able to obtain or enjoy the same goods, activities, services, and benefits that are available to other members of the public. This would include public spaces that may be used for temporary or pop-up vaccine sites, such as schools, recreation facilities, and medical offices or facilities.

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (RA):** Recipients of federal financial assistance are prohibited from discriminating in all programs and activities, on the basis of disability. Pharmacies, therefore, may not discriminate against customers on the basis prohibited by Section 504 of the RA and Section 1557 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA)—including with regard to supplying medications; making determinations regarding the suitability of a prescribed medication for a patient; or advising patients about medications and how to take them.

Ensure Accessible Communications

People who have certain disabilities may access printed information in a variety of ways. By making communications accessible, persons with disabilities are welcomed and able to participate in the services offered at medical practices. By communicating in a way that is accessible, medical practices can ensure that as many people as possible can access important information. Examples of accessible communications include using Plain Language, providing information in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, closed captions, and sign language. Digital materials such as emails, website content, and other electronic documents should be provided in formats readily accessible to screen readers or screen magnification software. Additional communication formats include American Sign Language, Inclusive Language, Trauma-Informed Communication, and Audio Formats.

- Plain Language is a way of writing that does not have any technical jargon, is clear and concise, without losing any meaning.
- Inclusive Language is a way of writing and speaking that does not exclude anyone (for example using gender neutral pronouns, i.e., they rather than he/she, and changing the focus of the language from disability to accessibility).
- Trauma-Informed Communication is a communication approach that takes into account potential triggers for people who have been through trauma. This could include providing a warning when information being communicated includes references to physical or mental abuse, gun violence, sexual assault, or other difficult topics.

Partner with Community Organizations

Developing relationships with aging and disability-led organizations that represent and serve people with disabilities can help in better anticipating community and access needs. Consider

connecting with your local Center for Independent Living, Area Agency on Aging, and other local, state, and national organizations. These organizations can provide practical information that will help in providing care. It is imperative to have individuals with disabilities speak for themselves when requesting assistance. Family members, friends, or personal care attendants should not make decisions for people with disabilities. In most instances, the individual receiving care will know best how to meet their needs.

Publicize Activities using Diverse Methods

When publicizing activities and services, do so by utilizing multiple types of media – advertise online, using social media as well as more traditional channels such as newspaper, radio, and TV. All of these can increase your reach and size of your audience. Including aging and disability service providers in your outreach efforts will help with reaching individuals who otherwise may be difficult to connect with.

Establish Accessible Vaccine Appointments

Assign a staff member at the facility the responsibility of ensuring access and accommodations for those who need them. A local Center for Independent Living may be able to provide technical assistance and training on how to best support individuals with disabilities and otherwise assist with effective outreach and operations related to access.

Give individuals options when scheduling appointments:



Via phone



In-person
with a
receptionist



Online, via
email, or via
text message



Offer
drop-in
hours

According to the ADA, an accessible vaccine location must:

- Provide information and directions in an accessible format before or during the event. Accessible formats may include pictures, visual schedules, or other supports requested as an accommodation.
- Allow people with disabilities to arrive at the site in the same transportation methods as other people.
- Ensure that all spaces are accessible, including public restrooms, telephones, water fountains, shelters, first aid stations and other common amenities.
- Provide accessible parking.
- Provide a universally accessible path to common areas.
- Ensure that pathways use accessible routes, curb ramps, and slip-resistant surfaces.

- Make sure that entrances are zero-level (flat) entry or have stable ramps that are 36" or wider.
- Create spaces with a 60-inch turning radius for wheelchair users to turn easily throughout the event area.
- Remove any objects in the event space that would create a stumbling or tripping hazard, such as plants, cords, or chairs in the walking path.
- Ensure that pathways are unobstructed.
- Indicate accessible entrances with signs.
- Maintain level flooring that is easy to use with assistive technologies such as canes, walkers, or wheelchairs.
- Make sure that all elevators meet ADA specifications.
- Use raised letters and Braille on signs so people with all visual disabilities can read them.

Ensure Accessible Parking and Transportation

Parking and transportation can be barriers for individuals with disabilities as they try to access vaccines. In addition to ensuring that parking is accessible, program accommodations can include drive-up vaccine sites where vaccines are administered while a person stays in their vehicle. Be sure to provide designated accessible parking spaces for each vaccine location. These spaces should have an aisle between cars to allow for individuals to easily load and unload from their vehicles. An accessible loading zone must have a vertical clearance of at least 114 inches for personal vans with raised roofs, buses, and paratransit vehicles. If there is insufficient vertical clearance for raised-roof vans or buses to pull underneath, temporary loading zones in other locations to accommodate these vehicles may need to be created. Vaccine sites should provide, at a minimum, the number of accessible parking spaces required by law. The ADA requires one accessible space for every 25 total spots provided.

Additional considerations for improving access:

- Participants are often required to complete or sign medical forms. Allow individuals to complete paperwork at home, be prepared to provide individualized assistance completing forms, or provide accessible digital formats online or via email as needed.
- Offer extended appointment times to ensure accommodations are provided and needs are met.
- Ensure questions and concerns are fully addressed and answered. Participants may have concerns regarding the COVID-19 vaccination that need additional clarity and explanation.
- It is imperative to document informed consent for those with a healthcare proxy.
- Information regarding the vaccine and potential side effects should be available in various accessible formats for those receiving their vaccinations.

Post-Vaccination planning

- Participants should be offered information in an accessible format regarding who to contact should they experience side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Offer assistance to individuals with scheduling 2nd dose or booster shots.

Closing Reminders

- Every person is different, and needs will vary.
- Accessibility is an ongoing process, but it is beneficial to everyone.
- Consult disability-led organizations, such as your local Center for Independent Living.

Additional Information and Assistance

Contact the local Center for Independent Living for additional information on how to make a vaccine site accessible:

<https://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 Vaccine Guidance for People with Disabilities:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/older-adults-and-disability.html>

Health Care and the American with Disabilities Act:

<https://adata.org/factsheet/health-care-and-ada>

Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers:

<https://adata.org/#slideshow-wrapper>

ADA.Gov:

www.ada.gov

RESOURCES USED IN THIS PUBLICATION

1. Vaccination Sites: Vaccinating Older Adults and People with Disabilities: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/clinical-considerations/older-adults-and-disability.html>
2. Guidance to Nation's Retail Pharmacies: <https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/special-topics/reproductive-healthcare/pharmacies-guidance/index.html>
3. Healthcare & the American with Disabilities Act: <https://adata.org/factsheet/health-care-and-ada>
4. Plain Language and Accessibility: <https://www.uada.edu/employees/division-accessibility/documents/plain-language.aspx#:~:text=This%20means%20writing%20in%20a,you%20are%20presenting%20to%20them>
5. Inclusive Language – Disability Services: <https://ds.gmu.edu/inclusive-language/>
6. Therapeutic Communication for Health Care Administrators: <https://tinyurl.com/ywa7hzf2>

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