COVID-19 has impacted the lives of all of us, and in response, Resources for Independence Central Valley, (RICV), has dedicated this issue of The Independent to providing pertinent Medical Rights information, vital during this pandemic. Inside you will be able to learn more about your medical rights, self-care, strategies for advocacy, how to create a connection kit, and other insights to help you get through this.

We may be physical distancing but, we are still in this together.

The virus poses a risk to everyone’s health and is also proving to be especially dangerous for people with certain types of disabilities and chronic health conditions as well as older adults. The pandemic has disrupted our lives and changed the way that we go to school, work, socialize, and more.

Government and private sector responses may also pose additional harm to persons with disabilities if discrimination based on disability results in the denial of healthcare. And there is a very real possibility that the spread of COVID-19 will result in a drastic reduction of personal assistants available to provide support to persons with disabilities who rely on their assistance with activities of daily living.

Disability nondiscrimination law prohibits covered entities from both treating an individual with a disability differently because of their disability or engaging in practices that disproportionately harm people with disabilities. Yet in this time of COVID-19, staying informed, knowing your rights and committing to self advocacy is more important than ever.
Advocacy in Action: 
An Open Letter from RICV’s Executive Director

Dear Medical Professionals,

We want to express both our gratitude and concern for you, as you respond to the devastating COVID-19 pandemic gripping our communities. It’s a terrifying time, and we know that especially without needed Personal Protective Equipment and other supplies, you are in an unconscionably high-risk situation. There are no comforting words for this level of risk. It’s awful.

Your lives are not disposable! And as people also facing grave risk, and their loved ones, we deeply empathize. Day by day, states and medical facilities are releasing triage plans that recommend who gets denied care when beds and ventilators are running low. We write to you as other people whose lives are being considered disposable — people with disabilities, fat people, elderly people, people with HIV/AIDS or other illnesses — along with our friends and loved ones who don’t want us to die.

Please take care: following discriminatory triage policies is UNLAWFUL.
Medical standards of care are correctly determined by the profession, but denying or withdrawing care based on protected characteristics violates many laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504, the Affordable Care Act, state and local civil rights laws, and/or the U.S. Constitution. This is not about “hard decisions” — it is about justice.

Medical professionals pledge oaths to do no harm, to care for the welfare of all your patients.
JOIN US in resisting discriminatory policies violating your oaths and responsibilities:

- Demand immediate expansion of resources: Avoid triage by demanding the supplies we all need: ventilators and parts, more hospital beds, and personal protective equipment for all medical workers!

- Demand federal & state decisions that flatten the curve: Governors and the President have the power to maintain or implement shelter-in-place orders, which will reduce transmission, save lives, and avoid triage.

- Take part in decisions as your facilities formulate policies and algorithms for ventilator use. Fight back when unjust point systems are proposed or implemented.

- Refuse discriminatory triage policies: Care for your patients without discrimination; don’t refuse ICU admittance based on disability, size, age, or AIDS status. Don’t take a patient off a ventilator to make room for a patient whose life is “more highly valued.”

Before COVID-19, marginalized communities have had reason to fear bias in medical settings. We are terrified of being killed by the people who are supposed to care for us. Let’s protect each other and fight for the resources and policies we need to get through this emergency together.

Signed,

Suzanna Gámez, Executive Director
Resources for Independence Central Valley

Signed,

#NoBodyIsDisposable Coalition
If You or Someone You Know is Disabled:

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws, you cannot be treated badly just because you have a disability or someone in your family has a disability, or because someone thinks you have a disability. You can ask for changes you need for your disability. The hospital and doctors have to help you unless it would be very dangerous or difficult, even with supports. This means:

- You CAN get medical care like everybody else. No one can deny you emergency care (like a ventilator) just because of your disability.
- You CAN bring a family member or other helper with you unless they are also sick.
- You CAN bring a trained assistance animal with you most of the time.
- You CAN bring your own stuff like a ventilator or wheelchair.
- You CAN get good communication. If you are deaf you get ASL interpreting or CART. You can get papers in Braille or large print or in a computer file. You can get information in simple words.
- You CAN get information in another language.
- You CAN get an interpreter.
- You CAN get help with follow-up care and services.

People with different kinds of physical and mental health disabilities, including higher weight people, have legal rights and are covered by disability laws when they try to get medical care. If you have a problem with a doctor or hospital during COVID-19, call Disability Rights California at 1-800.776-5746 Monday-Friday between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. TTY: 1-800-719-5798.

#CovidCantStopRICV

RICV Offices are Closed. But We are Still Working for You.

In order to keep our consumers, staff and community safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, RICV closed all offices. But COVID-19 can’t stop RICV. Our team is still working remotely during this time. We are dedicated to our consumers, empowering independence and improving lives. So, give us a call and leave us a message. We will get right back to you. And join us virtually via Zoom for RICV support groups and other gatherings. Follow us on Facebook to get the latest RICV updates and information.
**COVID-19: Strategies for Advocacy**

- **Be an advocate, bring an advocate.** An advocate is a friend, family member, or any person you trust to fight for you and your wishes.
- **Bring an advocate by phone** if they can’t come in person. Many ERs and hospitals have policies prohibiting cell phone use, but you can try telling them that you want to have your advocate present via phone because they are not allowing non-patients in treatment areas. If you need to have a person available by cell due to your disability, you can tell them you need them to make an accommodation in their policy.
- **If you are person with a disability, you have a right to communication assistance.** D/deaf people can get ASL interpreting or CART. People who are blind or have a vision impairment have a right to papers in Braille or large print or in a computer file.
- **You can get information in another language**, or you can have an interpreter.
- **If you don’t have an advocate, bring someone to act as a witness**; ask them to get names and take notes about what treatment you are offered and why.
- **You can write your desire for care and the phone number of your advocate/decision maker on your body using a Sharpie marker.**

**BE PREPARED: If You Have to go to the Hospital**

If you are going to the Emergency Room, you will want to bring as much support as you can. Many medical facilities have stricter limits on visitors or advocacy accompaniment right now. Consider bringing the following:

- **Medications.** (Hospital may not normally allow you to take your own medicine, however some feel more comfortable having their medicines with them.)
- **A Sharpie** (black or color that shows up well on your skin).
- **Advocacy Supports.**
- **Phone AND Phone Charger.**
- **Charged phone batteries—as many as you can bring.**
- **Know Your Rights** printout (see Page 3).
- **Printouts of advocacy documents/letters to providers.**
- **Connection Kit** (see Page 5).
- **A copy of your signed Power of Attorney** for Healthcare.
- **Communication tools:** paper, pens, tablet or any device you can use easily, assistive communication devices, extra hearing aid batteries, spare eyeglasses or contacts.
BE PREPARED:
Create Your Connection Kit

A Connection Kit helps you stay connected, and helps providers connect with you as a human being worthy of life-saving treatment should you be hospitalized. You should create more than one Connection Kit so your care team see it, and in case one of them is misplaced or lost in a hospital transfer.

If you are hospitalized, a Connection Kit should be attached to you—either on your gurney/bed, attached to your body, in your bag, and with a friend/advocate. It can be looped around your wrist where you and your care team can see it.

To make your Connection Kits, you are going to need a zip bag or transparent page protector and some string or ribbon. You will need to punch a small hole in the corner of the zip bag or transparent page protector so you can thread the string through it. It then can be tied to keep it secure when you use it.

Inside of each of your Connection Kits, you need to put:

- A print out of phone numbers of your closest family and friends
- A photo of family or loved ones, facing out
- A photo of yourself in your daily life with friends or at work, facing out so medical staff can view
- A mini summary introducing yourself, facing out

Economic Impact Payments Update:
The Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Treasury Department, and SSA announced that SSI recipients will automatically receive their $1,200 stimulus payments. Payments will be received by the same method they usually receive their SSI benefits, and they should be received by early May. This is a big victory that will ensure millions of people can access much-needed payments to help during this crisis.

Stay Informed: Resources During the COVID-19 Pandemic:
Disability Rights
www.dredf.org
www.nobodyisdisposable.org
National Council on Independent Living
www.ncil.org/covid-19
#StayHomeSaveLives
SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: What to Do If You Face Health Care Discrimination

We hope these strategies WON’T be necessary to use. We also know some of us can be in urgent health situations during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is worth considering many options.

We know it can harder for persons with disabilities, people of color, and other marginalized groups.

We acknowledge some of these strategies may be futile. For some people, it may be better to speak up strongly; for others, trying to be nice may be the best approach. Use what works for you, discard what does not.

If health care providers make you feel less deserving of the best care, remember there are hundreds of people with disabilities and their allies who know you deserve the best health care possible and we are rooting for you!

Try to connect with your providers. Remember they are under intense stress. Ask how they are doing.

Empathize with the challenges and pressure providers are under.

Humanize yourself. Show pictures of your family. Share something unique about yourself. Do your best to connect and be seen as person.

Tell them you want the treatment option that provide the best chance to recover, just like other people receive.

You can use your Sharpie marker to write your instructions directly on your chest in case you become unable to communicate.

Disability Nondiscrimination in Health Care during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Persons with disabilities face multiple harms during the COVID-19 pandemic. People who use personal care attendants from outside their homes cannot fully self-isolate, and they may face dangerous gaps in attendant care caused by staffing shortages. Some individuals with disabilities are more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 and, if they do, may get become more severely sick and have a higher chance of complications.

To make matters worse, COVID-19 treatment policies published by states and health care institutions advocate for the “rationing” of care and equipment, and many discriminate explicitly and implicitly on the basis of disability.

The lives of people with disabilities are as equally worthy and valuable as those of people without disabilities. Federal and state laws prohibit disability discrimination.

Under the laws, people with disabilities must have an equal opportunity to stay safe and to receive life-sustaining treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Tips for Self-Care During COVID-19

During times of change and uncertainty it is more important than ever to incorporate self-care and structure into your schedule. And while your typical self-care routine may no longer be available, there are ways to stay healthy and remain connected. Every day take a moment (or more) to take care of yourself.

Exercise
Exercising increases energy levels, improves happiness and doesn’t have to take place in a gym. Take a virtual workout class at home or spend some time outdoors walking or biking.

Eat Healthy
The foods we choose to nourish our bodies and the way we enjoy them can have a tremendous impact on our mental and physical health. Be purposeful when restocking on groceries and pick up foods that boost your mood such as oatmeal, nuts, and even dark chocolate.

Sleep
Sleep plays a major role in our overall health, improving emotional regulation and management of anxiety. It’s important to get up to 9 hours of sleep, especially during times of stress. Try to limit your exposure to the news and social media a couple of hours before bed.

Structure and Routines
Having regular times for eating, going to bed and rising in the morning, exercising, and working or studying can help maintain a sense of normalcy.

Learn and Explore
Research shows people engaged in learning feel more confidence, hope and purpose. Keep your mind active by taking virtual tours of museums, reading, trying new recipes, or solving puzzles.

Relax
Our connections with others help us cope with the ups and downs in life. Keep in contact with friends, family and co-workers through phone and video calls.

Talk to a Friend
Take breaks throughout the day, first thing in the morning or before bed to slow down and be present. The practice of pausing, breathing, and just “being” is essential to our well-being and mental health because it helps us reduce stress, worry less and it enhances feelings of resiliency.
Young Man Tackles Obstacles to Gain Independence and Empower Others

Matthew Lenhart has no problem introducing himself and pulling you into a conversation. He can step up on-stage to present to dozens of people, he can create dynamic graphics, and possesses the self-knowledge people long for. Such confidence and insight were not always the case. The tall, slender 21-year-old is the first to admit his younger years were a struggle. Although his autism was not apparent at birth, Matthew said he rates high on the autism scale, and his childhood was full of tantrums, he struggled with verbal expression, and was destructive in school.

According to Matthew, his “academic diagnosis: didn’t occur until he approached the completion of middle school. A medical diagnosis came later and placed him at the high-end of the autism scale. By then he had been subject to the verbal abuse of his siblings who called him a mistake. Labeled him dumb. And, resented him for needing help with things.

“Before I had struggles and did not know where I should be and what I should do,” Matthew said. “With my involvement with RICV I learned where I want to be in the future. I understand what options and opportunities there are for me out there.”

RICV Program Manager Sarah Harris said Matthew’s intern work with youth was quite successful. “Youth in school classrooms and during the summer program looked up to him because he was genuine and motivating,” she said.

“Motivating—that’s just how Matthew envisions his future. “I want to do outreach. I want to be a presenter. I want to help people,” he added. “I want to get out in the community and help people get person-centered.”

Although he has taken the steps to leave his family home and currently resides in transitional housing, Matthew sees moving out on his own, having a car, starting a family, and doing what he loves—empowering others.

“I want to help people see who they are, know what can support them, and what their future can be instead of how others view them.”

Matthew Lenhart

“I felt neglected and was always looking for approval,” explained Matthew. “I was very introverted and would not go outside.” He withdrew into a solitary world of video games as an escape. “Playing video games were how I coped,” Matthew said. “I would shut down and ignore everything else in life.”

Creativity and art also provided a way for Matthew to deal with his feelings and family. He used drawing as a way to express emotions without having to physically act them out. “I drew a lot of trees—a chaos tree—and at other times, a happy tree singing in the rain,” he confided.
If you still haven’t responded to the 2020 Census, it’s not too late. Remember, participation is simple, quick and confidential.

RICV is a Questionnaire Assistance Center (QAC). Although our offices are closed, we can still assist you in filling out your census questionnaire.

As of last week, more than 46% of all households across California have responded to the 2020 Census! That’s 6.9 million households — making California the state with the most households that have already responded to the census.

But we still have millions more California households to go to achieve a fair and accurate count.

Households that have not yet responded to their census invitation, should have started to receive a paper questionnaire in the mail as of April 8.

That means, while Californians are at home physically distancing, they can respond to the census by mail, online or by phone.

To complete the census online, go to my2020census.gov.


Completing the census only takes about 10 minutes and will help your community for the next 10 years! Census participation determines each community’s share of federal funding for healthcare, schools, roads, and more for the next decade.

When you complete the census, make sure that everyone who lives in your household is counted. That includes all children and any extended family or friends who are living with you (regardless of immigration, citizenship, or voter registration status — everyone needs to be counted).

CalFresh Info and Updates

What is CalFresh?
CalFresh is for low-income Californians so they can purchase food. CalFresh benefits are issued on an EBT card that works like a debit card and can be used at most grocery stores and many farmers markets to purchase food.

COVID-19 and CalFresh:
If you already get CalFresh, you may get extra CalFresh benefits on your EBT card to help buy food in April and May due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Using CalFresh Online:
Starting April 28, CalFresh recipients can use their EBT card to make online grocery purchases from Amazon and Walmart.

Need to apply for CalFresh?
RICV can assist you with the Calfresh application, eligibility and intake process.

For help, call Maria Barragan at 559-221-2330 at ext.114 or email mbarragan@ricv.org
During the COVID-19 pandemic, RICV’s services and activities are still occurring—just in a new way. We may be physically distancing, but we are still socially connected via a video communications platform called ZOOM. It is an easy, reliable video and audio-conferencing app which provides collaboration, chat, and webinars across mobile devices, desktops, and yes, even telephones.

Once you have downloaded the app, you can join a meeting using one of these methods:

- Click Join a Meeting if you want to join in without signing in.
- Sign in to Zoom then click Join. Enter the meeting ID number and name.
- If you’re signed in, change your name if you don’t want your default name to appear.
- If you’re not signed in, enter a display name.

#CovidCantStopRICV

**Youth Continue to “Be About It”**

Participants in RICV’s youth group Be About It, are not letting physical distancing stop their meetings. The youth have been conducting virtual group meetings every Friday on the Zoom platform.

According to RICV Program Manager Sarah Harris, youth with disabilities get together weekly to learn new skills, share feelings, and talk about how they are spending their time staying home. For more information or to join in, contact Sarah at sharris@ricv.org or leave her a voicemail at 559.221.2330 ext. 116.

**Weekly Groups Zoom**

For the health of consumers, RICV’s Independent Living Specialists quickly responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned RICV Peer Support Groups a virtual meeting format. Hot topics have been Social Security benefits, CalFresh food assistance, self-care strategies, and of course, COVID-19.

The Tulare/Kings Counties group meets every Friday at 11 a.m. Contact Amanda Chairez at achairez@ricv.org to join in.

Email Michael Mendez at mmendez@ricv.org to connect into the Fresno group which meets Wednesdays at 2:00 p.m.

**What the ZOOM?**

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ABOVE: A screen shot of participants engaging in the RICV youth group meeting via Zoom.

#BeAboutItRICV

#CovidCantStopRICV

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