

National Core Indicators®

Data Highlight



What do NCI Data Tell Us About Access to Cell/Smartphones Among People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities?

In the 2018-2019 In-Person Survey data collection cycle¹, 56% of respondents said they had a cell or smartphone (states ranged from 70% with phones to 49% with phones); of those without a phone, 44% of respondents said that they wanted one.

Why does it matter? During the COVID 19 pandemic, much like people all over the US, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) will limit their contact with others,. However, for people with IDD, the challenges posed by such isolation may be much greater than those encountered by the general population. Isolation is linked to the risk of abuse. People with IDD may already have limited social network, and social distancing will further limit their social connections . Further support from familiar DSPs may be unreliable given their risk of the virus and potential quarantine. Finally, families may not be able to visit their family members to reduce the risk of infection. The ability of people with IDD to communicate with friends, family and support providers is critical in these times. Cell phones and smart phones are one important way that people with IDD can communicate – a tool that 96% of the general public has access to. However, it is important to recognize that many individuals will need ongoing support to use this piece of assistive technology.

Questions to ask: Does your state include cell phones and cell service in “personally directed goods and services” and/or “personal emergency response systems” in HCBS waivers? Is it possible to work with the Developmental Disabilities Councils to fund small grants for the purchase of cell phones and cell phone service? Have you explored the use of ABLE Act funds as a way for participants to purchase cell phones? Can your state collaborate with other groups that collect used and donated cell phones such those concerned with domestic violence? Have you consulted with organizations working with the federal Tech and Assistive Technology Acts to determine whether collaboration aimed at expanding access to cell phones is possible? Can your state reach out to telecom companies to encourage them to donate cell phones?

Want to know more?

- Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2014 (ABLE Act).. <https://www.ablenrc.org/what-is-able/what-are-able-accounts/>
- Arc of Philadelphia. *The Declaration The Rights of People with Cognitive Disabilities to Technology and Information Access.* http://www.colemaninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/The-Declaration_one-pager_ArcPhiladelphia.pdf
- Federal Communications Commission. Lifeline Support for Affordable Communications. <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/lifeline-support-affordable-communications>
- How to Choose the Right Cell Phone for a Person with a Disability. <https://www.wikihow.com/Choose-the-Right-Cell-Phone-for-a-Person-with-a-Disability>
- Missouri Assistive Technology. Telecommunications Access Program. <https://at.mo.gov/telecom-access-program/tap-wireless.html>
- Technology-Related Assistance Act (Tech Act) of 1988 (Public Law 100-407) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-102/pdf/STATUTE-102-Pg1044.pdf>
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (Pub.L. 113–128) <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/about/overview/>



¹ The 2018-19 In-Person Survey Data are not yet final and are subject to change at the time of publication of this data highlight