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Pa. COVID-19 Disability Barriers, Solutions Recognized as "Novel and Emerging Practice" by CDC

The Arc of Pennsylvania's multi-year investigation into health disparities faced by the disability community during COVID-19 earns national recognition, driving future advocacy and solutions through collaborative efforts.

HARRISBURG, Pa. (March 3, 2025) --- A statewide effort by The Arc of Pennsylvania, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Health, to investigate, educate and report on challenges that the commonwealth's disability community faced during the COVID-19 pandemic has been named a "[novel and emerging practice](#)" (NEP) by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).

The Arc of Pennsylvania and the COVID-19 Health Disparities Statewide Leadership Task Force, with input from regional community work groups, in August 2022 issued a report that identified the effects that the COVID-19 emergency response had on the disability community. Following that, The Arc convened regional workgroups to ask members of the disability community about solutions to address those barriers in the future. That report was issued in August 2023, concluding a multi-year effort funded with a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Health through the CDC's National Initiative to Address COVID-19 Health Disparities Among Populations at High-Risk and Underserved.

Contributors to the report included people with lived experience of a disability, caretakers, and family members of those with a disability, and professionals in support fields. The contributors were from the intersection of rural and racial diversity, and represented diverse types of disabilities, including physical, intellectual, developmental, and behavioral, as well as emotional, sensory impairment, and complex medical disabilities.

"It is an honor that the CDC recognized this work as an NEP," said Sherri Landis, Executive Director of The Arc. "The Task Force and regional community work groups worked tirelessly to learn about the barriers and health disparities faced by the disability community, and to develop solutions to prevent this from happening again. We look forward to continuing to

advocate for the disability community, and these solutions provide us with guidance and messaging to educate legislators, policymakers and other stakeholders.”

Last year, The Arc was recognized by the National Network of Public Health Institutes for its campaign to raise awareness of health disparities related to COVID-19 in the disability community. The Arc received the “Strengthening Public Health System Award,” which recognizes project teams that implement a successful initiative to increase the capacity of state, tribal, local and territorial health departments and their partners to advance positive health outcomes.

To read the reports, please visit <https://thearcpcpa.org/healthcare-initiatives/>.

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About The Arc of Pennsylvania

The Arc of Pennsylvania is the state’s leading advocacy organization promoting the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes. More at <https://thearcpcpa.org>.