



# Utilizing community survey data to inform effective communication for individuals with disabilities and/or access or functional needs in Niagara County, New York.

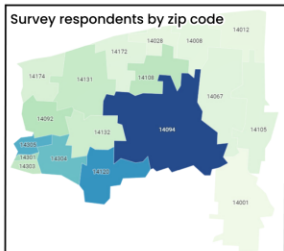
Victoria Balazs, Dylan Delgado, BS, Carmyn Gonzalez, BS, Grace Milton, BS, Andee Wik, MPH, CHES  
The Niagara County Department of Health



## Introduction

Individuals with disabilities and/or access and functional needs (AFN) can possess unique challenges. In Niagara County, New York, 10.2% of individuals under 65 years of age have been diagnosed with a disability/AFN, and 20.9% of county residents are 65 years of age or older (1). The way in which these disabilities/AFN's impact one's ability to receive health and emergency preparedness information has not yet been evaluated in Niagara County, NY.

The Niagara County Department of Health (NCDOH) risk communications plan has a section regarding hard to reach populations, which includes data on best communication methods, but this plan is outdated and not tailored to Niagara County residents. We can update this plan utilizing community input and survey data, and use it to inform changes to better direct health information dissemination to individuals with disabilities/AFN.



Niagara County, New York

## Objectives

To obtain community input, a Community Engagement Survey was developed and offered to all Niagara County residents. Using this data, NCDOH sought to accomplish two things:

1. Understand and determine the preferred methods of communication for people with disabilities/AFN.
2. Use this information to revise our communication strategies to be as inclusive as possible in our communications with county residents.

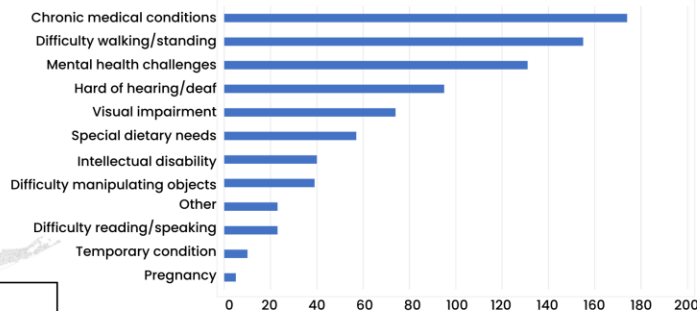
## Materials and Methods

A survey was developed to assess the needs of people with disabilities/AFN, as well as to determine the most effective means of conveying information and to assess the readiness of people in the case of an emergency. Three formats were available: an online version, a paper version, and a large print paper version. Data was collected from June 1 to October 6, 2023.

The survey covers topics including COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and Long COVID, emergency preparedness, volunteerism inquiries, socioeconomic demographics, communication preferences, and general health questions. The survey data will be utilized for the development of health education materials and programs with considerations for preferred methods of communication for individuals with disabilities/AFN. NCDOH will also use the survey data to best understand the needs of the community in Niagara County, and how NCDOH can best assist them.

The Community Engagement survey was offered at various county events, such as the Niagara County Fair, Lewiston Peach Festival, health education tabling events, and more. It was also given to community partners for distribution, and was promoted on NCDOH's social media pages.

Types of Disabilities/AFN Among Survey Respondents in Niagara County, New York (n=420)



Survey respondents received a health kit, school kit, sensory kit, or raffle ticket to win an Austin Air Purifier upon completing the survey.

## Results

The survey was filled out by 1,150 respondents, all of whom were Niagara County residents.

- 265 (23.1%) self-identified as a person with a disability/AFN
- 173 (15.1%) self-identified as a proxy for someone with a disability/AFN

The most common disabilities/AFN for survey participants were:

- Chronic medical conditions (41.4%)
- Difficulty walking or standing (36.9%)
- Mental health challenges/conditions (31.2%)
- Hard of hearing/deaf (22.6%)
- Visual impairment (17.6%).

For those with disabilities/AFN, the most common preferred methods of communication were:

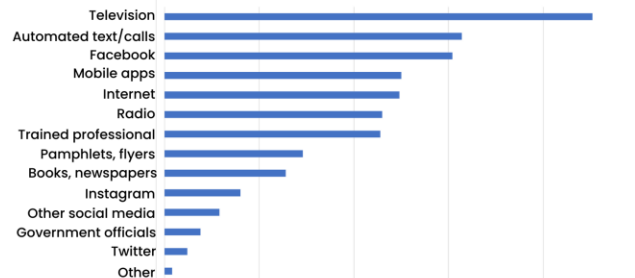
- In-person, verbal (83.1%)
- Passive (email, texting, message board, etc) (40.6%)
- In-person, written (25.6%).

Of all respondents, 8.7% of individuals noted higher verbal comprehension, while 21.9% of individuals documented higher reading comprehension when offered health education materials from a professional.

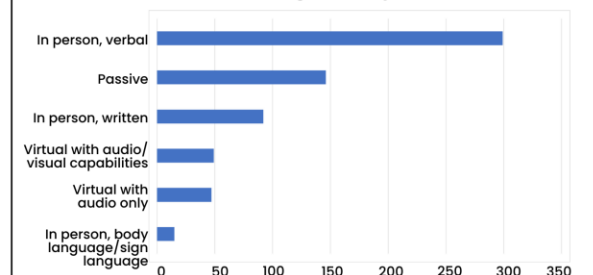
Respondents with disabilities/AFN noted that their preferred source of information would come from:

- Television (54%)
- SMS text messaging or automated calls (37%)
- Facebook (36%)

Preferred Sources of Information Among Survey Respondents with Disabilities/AFN in Niagara County, New York (n=419)



Preferred Forms of Communication Among Survey Respondents With Disabilities/AFN in Niagara County, New York (n=360)



## Conclusion

To best reach the disability/AFN population based off of their preferences, in-person discussions, such as health education classes, in-person events, or town hall meetings to address personal concerns, should be utilized. After in-person verbal communication occurs, participants should be offered tangible materials with a summary of the information delivered, such as an outline or pamphlet, since reading comprehension is higher than verbal comprehension among our targeted population.

Secondary to in-person sessions, email newsletters, automated text messaging, or social media can be used to achieve passive communication. Utilizing these methods would be the most accessible way for individuals with access/functional needs or disabilities to learn new information from their local health department, while being mindful of cost-effective communication methods for a county health department

Utilization of television, including news channels and commercials, would also be a beneficial way to reach this population.

## Acknowledgements

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Jennifer Rowan, Public Health Analyst  
Gabby Hastings, Local Coordinator

## References

1. New York State Community Health Indicator Report (CHIRS), 2023