

# Challenges facing the charity sector during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Contact

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Embracing Complexity is a coalition of over 50 leading UK charities working together to think differently about people with neurodevelopmental conditions (NDCs). NDCs include autism, learning disability, dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Tourette syndrome and many other conditions. Our first report, published in May 2019, found significant overlap in the challenges faced by people with NDCs. We are calling for a more joined-up approach to diagnosis, services and research.

## The impact of COVID-19 on our member charities

### *"We are facing the perfect storm of increased demand and reduced income"*

In April 2020, we carried out a survey of our members on the impact of COVID-19 on their finances, services and beneficiaries.

- **Around 4 in 10 respondent charities have a negative view of their organisation's financial position over the next year.** Cancellation of fundraising events and shop-based collections, reduced donations as supporters feel the financial impact of COVID-19 and greater competition for funding from trusts and foundations are all leading to a significant reduction in income.
- **Over half of our respondents expect to suspend or reduce support** for beneficiaries due to financial difficulties, including telephone support, training and research, while **16% feared closing altogether**. Around 4 in 10 have furloughed staff.
- **As income sharply reduces, over 6 in 10 respondents have faced an increase in demand** in areas such as helpline calls, emotional support and assistance with accessing services and medication since the outbreak began. **Many people with NDCs are facing unique challenges during this time**, such as particular vulnerability to COVID-19, increased mental health difficulties and loss of existing support due to social distancing measures, school closures and the emergency changes to the Care Act 2014.
- **For some people with NDCs, moving into an uncertain "new normal" will be just as difficult as moving into lockdown.** Existing inequalities in health, education and employment are likely to widen as a result of the disruption and resulting economic downturn, and the changes to social care and mental health regulations enacted in the Coronavirus Act 2020 could last up to two years. **A strong charity sector is needed more than ever to support people with NDCs through this crisis and beyond.**

### *"The people we're supporting are in survival mode"*

## What we should do

### *"Emergency funding is currently being directed through to local organisations – small national charities like us can't access funds"*

- Many of our members are national charities supporting people with rare conditions who cannot access support locally. This group risks falling through cracks in the Government's existing charity support offer. **The Government should make financial support available for small national charities.**
- Our membership includes research charities which would not benefit from the current offer as they do not provide frontline services, but which are still supporting vulnerable people through this crisis and can make valuable contributions to the COVID-19 research effort. **The Government should ensure that medical research charities are supported at this crucial time.**
- The challenges COVID-19 has caused for people with NDCs will last into the long term, and our member charities are likely to face increased demand in the months and years to come, likely coupled with an economic downturn. **The Government should prepare long-term support for charities to ensure we can continue to support people with NDCs in the future.**