

The Arc of Indiana
A View from My Window
A View into the U.S. Census
February 25, 2020

Michelle Fisher:

Hey everybody, it's Michelle Fisher, and welcome into A View From My Window. As always, I thank you for joining us today. Today we are talking about the 2020 US census, and between March 12th and March 20th, invitations to participate in the 2020 US census will start arriving in households across the country. The goal of the US census is for every person in the US to be counted.

Michelle Fisher:

Catherine Vest, communication and outreach specialist for Indiana Disability Rights, is with us today to share information about the census and why it is important for people with disabilities to participate. Catherine, thank you for joining me today.

Catherine Vest:

Thank you. I appreciate being here.

Michelle Fisher:

So first, Catherine, let's talk about what the census is and what its main purpose is.

Catherine Vest:

Sure. The purpose of the census, first of all, it's required by the constitution for all citizens that live in the United States, everybody that's living the United States, to be counted. That information is collected, and it provides evidence to determine what kind of resources get allocated to various districts, areas. So it's a way to protect our way of living here.

Michelle Fisher:

What are the ways that people can be sure that they are counted in the census?

Catherine Vest:

Well, as you just mentioned, from March 12th, April 27th is the time for self-reporting. So that means that people can respond to the census. They have three options of how to respond. They can do it online, mail in a response form, or they can do it over the phone. If they do not respond after April 27th, then the next period of time, I would say it's about early July, from then to about early July. The Census Bureau is more likely, or an official will be coming to the houses to knock on doors to collect information from you that way.

Michelle Fisher:

Okay. Then what should people fill out, and when should people fill out their census report? Is there a deadline to get that completed?

Catherine Vest:

Actually, we do not have a deadline, but it's highly recommended that people respond as early as possible, because that way they have more control about where and how they can respond. They can do it the way they want to so that they make sure that they're counted. So if they do it in one of those three ways that we mentioned earlier, it saves a trip from a person from the Census Bureau coming to their house.

Michelle Fisher:

We talked about in the introduction that it's important, why it's important for people with disabilities to participate. So what obstacles do people with disabilities face in participating in the census, and what resources are available to help them participate?

Catherine Vest:

Most barriers that are faced with filling out the census, I would say are accessibility. So getting access to the census. So we faced this challenge by the Census Bureau having guidance for people with disabilities. They have guidance for people that are low vision or blind. They have large print braille and braille materials available on their website. It's under language support, and it's also on our website as well.

Michelle Fisher:

So how about the case of people who may be living in a group home or a residential program funded by the Medicaid waiver? What can providers do to help make sure the people they serve are counted?

Catherine Vest:

It's a separate process for people that are living in a facility or a group home compared with people that are self-reporting. In this kind of situation, it really kind of depends on each individual facility, how they want to manage it, but they do have a responsibility to fill out the census, but for individuals living in a group home facility or treatment facility, it's a separate process. It's called home quarters enumeration.

Catherine Vest:

What happens with that process is that those facilities, their program administer or administrator will receive communication from the Census Bureau, they'll be contacted by the Census Bureau, and they need to determine how they want to count the residents, what way they want to report that information. It could be based on their time and resources. So they have an electronic transfer option where they can electronically transfer information to the Census Bureau. They can fill out a paper request, or a Census Bureau representative could come to the facility and take the information there. So I would recommend for DSPs who are working in a group home facility to be aware that this is going to be happening soon, and to maybe contact their administrators or their superiors to let them know that this is coming and to make sure that they have a plan for how to respond to it. Early March is when the census begins. So they'll be starting to reach out around that time frame.

Michelle Fisher:

So then let's talk about what will Indiana Disability Rights be doing to educate people about the census, and where can people find those resources?

Catherine Vest:

We are doing several things. We have a Facebook live feed that we had with two different people. One was from the state library, and another representative from AARP. We started to kick off the new year by talking about basic information about the census that will be coming soon, why it's important, and recently, last week, our Facebook live video, we were talking about fraudulent or scam census information that makes it look like it's a census, people could be coming to your door asking for information, so how to avoid that kind of thing. How do you know that it's truly from the Census Bureau and that it's not a scam?

Catherine Vest:

So we'd had to talk about that. I think it was last week on Friday. We educated people on how to know if that person really is truly representing the Census Bureau or not. We also are meeting with different people in the community talking about the census. Right now, I'm working on two different projects. We will have different locations where people with disabilities can come and complete their census there, respond to the census at a different location if they like, if they feel more safe there. If they have a more safe, neutral place, we would have individuals there that would be able to help them complete the census if they need assistance. So it's just a way for people to feel more confident and safe instead of maybe unsure of the government taking this count. So I've been in touch with a lot of different people in the community talking about the census, trying to get the word out and educate people about what's happening.

Michelle Fisher:

You were saying about how you want to get the word out. So is there anything else you want to add that people need to know?

Catherine Vest:

We also have a website, I'd like people to know that. So we have several resources there regarding cybersecurity. We have a frequently asked questions page. We have videos for providing some guidance, we have them in English and Spanish. We just added an ASL video as well.

Catherine Vest:

We just found a website link where you could practice taking the census online so you can do ... Keep in mind, it's not the real census, it's not going to count your information, but you can do a mock trial online. So if you want to see what the census looks like in practice before you actually fill it out, you can do that. That's located on our website again.

Michelle Fisher:

Well, thank you, Catherine, so very much for telling me about the census. You're a wonderful person, and Indiana Disability Rights is lucky to have you. Thank you so very much.

Catherine Vest:

Thank you so much, Michelle. I appreciate you having me.

Michelle Fisher:

For more information about the US census, visit Indiana Disability Rights at IN.gov/IDR, and The Arc of the United States at thearc.org/census. Thank you for listening today, everybody, and a special thanks to our sponsor, The National Bank of Indianapolis, and to Indiana's division of disability and rehabilitative services for their funding and collaboration. Thank you for listening today, everybody. Have a great day today. Bye bye.