



MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COALITION

Dedicated to the rights and quality of life for people with developmental disabilities in Maryland

November 24, 2020

The Honorable Robert Neall, Secretary of Health
Maryland Department of Health
201 West Preston Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Secretary Neall:

As Maryland continues making plans for how to allocate COVID-19 vaccinations, we write to reiterate that vaccine distribution and allocation must be done in a safe and equitable manner, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) must be explicitly addressed in the Maryland COVID-19 Vaccination Plan.

- **People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are a high-risk population and should be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccines.**

It is well documented that people with IDD have long experienced structural health inequities, including social determinants that increase their overall health risk. Complications from and death rates due to COVID-19 for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are also disproportionately higher when compared to people without IDD (Turk, et al., 2020; Landes, et al., 2020). COVID-19-related fatality rates among people with IDD nationally who have tested positive for COVID-19 are 100% to 200% greater than the mortality rates among the general population who have tested positive for COVID-19. Therefore, individuals with IDD must be specifically considered and prioritized in the COVID-19 vaccine allocation efforts.

- **As essential healthcare personnel, direct support professionals working in all settings (residential congregate, day program, and individual homes) are on the frontlines supporting people with IDD to stay safe and healthy, and should be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccines.**

Many people with IDD rely on home health and personal support workers who travel between client homes for daily support. Numerous others live in congregate residential settings and/or receive services during the day at a provider location, supported by direct support professionals. Direct support professionals (DSP) play a critical role in the daily lives of the over 17,000 people with developmental disabilities who receive services and supports funded and licensed by the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). In recognition of these critical services, Governor Hogan deemed the services as essential and the direct support professionals as essential employees (Executive Order NO. 20-03-31-02).

- **Prioritized access to COVID-19 vaccines is critical for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and direct support professionals.**
- **When prioritized, people must still be afforded the option to receive the vaccine or not. No one should be required to be vaccinated.**

Maryland's draft vaccination plan acknowledges the need for equitable access to the vaccine. Many people with disabilities will face barriers to safe access of the vaccine, including significant challenges with transportation and concerns about exposure to the virus at vaccination sites. If possible, and in consideration of vaccine storage constraints we may face, home health and other direct support professionals with appropriate training should be allowed to vaccinate people in their homes.

We know that the pandemic has placed tremendous demands on limited resources. We appreciate that Governor Hogan has continued to prioritize people with developmental disabilities and the direct support professional whom they rely on for vital services. We strongly recommend you to continue this prioritization in order to save lives of people who are especially vulnerable to COVID-19, and their staff.

Sincerely,



Rachel London, Executive Director
Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council



Ken Capone, Public Policy Director
People on the Go of Maryland



Ande Kolp, Executive Director
The Arc Maryland



Laura Howell, Executive Director
MD Association of Community Services



Megan Rusciano, Interim Co-Managing Attorney
Disability Rights Maryland

cc: The Honorable Carol Beatty, Secretary, MDOD
The Honorable Bernard Simons, Deputy Secretary for Developmental Disabilities, MDH