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Nadhim Zahawi MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care

Email: minister.zahawi@beis.gov.uk

Dear Mr Zahawi,

Prioritising vaccines for people who have a learning disability and autism

I am writing in response to your appointment to the Vaccine Taskforce overseeing the roll out of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

As a support provider for adults who have a learning disability and autism, Dimensions has experienced first-hand the significant risk the virus poses to the people we support and to colleagues working on the frontline to deliver social care support.

You may already be aware of the recent report from Public Health England, which highlighted that the death rate from COVID-19 for people who have a learning disability is over 3 times higher than it is for the general population. Additionally, it showed that people who have a learning disability are dying from COVID-19 at a younger age than the general population, with the highest number of deaths being in the 55-65 age bracket, as compared to over 75 for the general population.

We believe this higher death rate is attributable to the systemic inequalities that people who have a learning disability experience in healthcare services, which have been well documented. Some people we support will be more clinically vulnerable, on account of co-morbidities associated with their learning disability, but for many people, poorer outcomes after contracting the virus will be due to non-clinical issues accessing healthcare.

Given the higher death rate and the known inequalities for people who have a learning disability, we are urging the government to prioritise vaccination for people who have a learning disability. We believe the infrastructure provided by the learning disability register in primary care and through the social care provider market would enable an effective, accelerated roll out of vaccines to people who have a learning disability. This is particularly true for people who receive care and support in registered care homes, supported living and extra care settings, where it is currently

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planned that the workforce will receive priority vaccinations. We recommend that the government take the opportunity to offer vaccinations to people supported in these settings alongside social care workers.

I'd also like to highlight the need for accessible information about the vaccine and the vaccination programme to support people to engage with the roll out. This includes easy read materials and specific resources to support decision making for people who may lack capacity to make a decision about a vaccine and who may struggle to tolerate vaccination due to their learning disability.

Alongside the high death rate and poorer outcomes for people who have a learning disability, it is also the case that people supported in social care settings have experienced persistent disruption to their lives throughout the pandemic. The need to protect people from the virus has meant that many people supported in care homes and supported living settings have had only limited contact with loved ones. In some cases, people will not have seen their families since March. This is having a detrimental impact on people's health and wellbeing and we believe the long term impact on learning disability health will be significant. Prioritisation in the vaccination programme could support more contact with loved ones and a relaxation of restrictions on the lives of people who have experienced greater limitations than the general population throughout the pandemic.

I would be pleased to meet with you and officials working on the vaccination programme to discuss the needs of people who have a learning disability further.

Yours sincerely,



Steve Scown
Chief Executive
Dimensions

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